Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion

SYSTEMATIC ATHEOLOGY

ATHEISM'S REASONING WITH THEOLOGY

John R. Shook

Systematic Atheology

Atheology is the intellectual effort to understand atheism, defend the reasonableness of unbelief, and support nonbelievers in their encounters with religion. This book presents a historical overview of the development of atheology from ancient thought to the present day. It offers in-depth examinations of four distinctive schools of atheological thought: rationalist atheology, scientific atheology, moral atheology, and civil atheology. John R. Shook shows how a familiarity with atheology's complex histories, forms, and strategies illuminates the contentious features of today's atheist and secularist movements, which are just as capable of contesting each other as opposing religion. The result is a book that provides a disciplined and philosophically rigorous examination of atheism's intellectual strategies for reasoning with theology. *Systematic Atheology* is an important contribution to the philosophy of religion, religious studies, secular studies, and the sociology and psychology of nonreligion.

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A Prefatory Address to the Reader

This volume of atheology has atheism's side of the story to tell. Some excuse for this partiality must be offered to the reader, since published accounts of atheism are not scarce. Innumerable books written by theists depict atheism in stark terms, letting theism's advantages shine for the faithful like sunlight through fogs of doubt. As for books by atheists, besides the many aggrieved rejections of religion, worshipful hagiographies recount the lives of emboldened atheists to illustrate reason's predestined ascendency over religion. This book serves as an academic alternative to theology's dim view of the faithless, and a systematic alternative to secularism's bright view of progress. For two further reasons, important to both factions, atheism deserves a full and fair presentation: atheism molded theism's development in the past, and atheism will help shape what theism may become in the future.

Atheology can also sharpen atheism's focus here in the present. Atheology is concerned with gods and whether any god is real enough to make a difference to anything else. Although atheism cannot agree that convictions about gods are right, atheism sees how god-beliefs exist, and how faiths make a difference to people holding them. Religion's defenders strenuously argue that faithful belief in god should exist, as if that is the same as arguing that god exists. This confusion is understandable. For a religion, maintaining belief is the primary goal, in order to ensure its own existence for generation after generation, so it may practically overlook the difference between upholding belief and upholding god. Reasoning with theists about the reality of god, and not just about beliefs of people, is atheism's main goal. Atheists can forget that goal as quickly as theists. It is not unreasonable to offer alternatives to religious faith, but atheism cannot be only about disparaging what others have affirmed for themselves. As theologians understand best, the psychological field of conviction is where religion naturally enjoys most every advantage. Atheists charging this way and that, first defining faith as the absence of reason and then trying to reason against faith, seem more lost in shadow (a shadow left by god?) than any of their elusive targets.

Those who stay focused on arguments against god find their difficulties doubled—before winning on the well-lit field of reason, an opponent must be found there. Fortunately for the atheist, a real god would have reasons

to exist, not staking its reality on faith alone. Thinking that god should be real is the prerogative of the religious, of course, and they can give reasons why, even if nothing almighty descends for a dialogue. Not even tenacious faith can avoid the contest of reasons. Agreeing with atheism that there is no reason to think that god is real, and advising that faith alone should light the pious path, are intriguing prescriptions for religiosity, but those perspectives cannot evade reasoning. Whatever might be said to the religious to keep up their faith and reassure them that faith is sensible, amount to recommended ideas that function like reasons. "Why faith?" is the essential question, and affirming answers still amount to reasons, reasons open to both positive consideration and negative criticism. Any religion might say that faith is beyond reason or even wisdom, but no religion tells followers that answering the call of faith is not the sensible response.

Atheists well know that the question directed at them, "Why not have faith?" is an opening for a litany of reasons from the faithful. The commonest accusation against the atheist is that an atheist is a fool since there is no good reason to deny god, and therefore an atheist either does not know about god (atheism due to ignorance), does not want to acknowledge god (atheism due to depravity), or does not possess one's senses (atheism due to madness). That accusation presumes that good reasons to affirm god are already known, which is an assumption that atheism obviously does not make. The very possibility that atheism may be wrong, a possibility so important for the religious, already presupposes that good enough reasons for god are available, even if belief in god should be entirely a matter of faith. The purest of faiths is still answerable to reasoning about what is helpful and sensible, and true faith is capable of answering to reason. The power of faith would not render it mute, just as the power of reason would not rest in silence. Their voices are the melodies in counterpoint for Chapter 1, *The Overture*.

Two points about terminology are necessary. First, this book uses the word 'god' in lower case for a generic deity when no specific religion's god is presumed, and only uses capital-letter 'God' when the context requires a reference to an author's Christian God. Second, this book does not assume that 'god' or 'God' would only be an existing being, just an entity among many, somehow comparable in being to the rest of the world's objects or the entire world. Atheism expressly denies that god has existence or being, in agreement with theologies protesting that mere existence cannot be ascribed to a genuine god. Of course, atheism also claims that 'god' is not about anything real at all—atheism disagrees with any opinion taking a god to be more than just a human notion. Theologies claiming that god does not exist, has no being, and entirely lacks reality are theologies seeking pure mystery and religious godlessness, and their convergence with atheology is discussed in the third chapter. The phrase "god does not exist" is too familiar to readers to drop entirely, so a theologically discriminating reader can substitute

"god is not real" or "god lacks reality" in order to avoid wrongly accusing atheology that it might mistake god for an existing being.

Acknowledgments are made for earlier versions of some chapters: "Philosophy of Religion and Two Types of Atheology," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 76 (2015): 1–19; "Rationalist Atheology," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 78 (2015): 329–348; and "Scientific Atheology," *Science, Religion and Culture* 1 (2014): 32–48.

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1 The Overture

An atheist is uninterested in any god, but the gods should not be dismayed. Most gods could hear little acclamation from the planet, if there really are any gods to listen. Mass extinctions of deities have happened episodically ever since religion's emergence. Some have survived. Many people on earth still claim an acquaintance with at least one god. They know which god they feel acquainted with, so they would rather be called "knowers" and not just "believers." A person naturally believes in what one thinks is known. The reverse is not true, since knowledge is not so easy to acquire as belief, as everyone also knows. Those claiming an acquaintance with a god can understand the difference, and that is why they conjoin their belief with conviction, rather than the humility that befits mere opinion. Unacquainted with any gods, atheists at least humbly know how they are not that kind of knower. And that complete lack of familiarity also restrains an atheist from supposing that others do know a god or two. No atheist could know that someone else knows god, since atheists are in no position to confirm that acquaintance. Knowers would tell atheists, "You can't say that I'm unacquainted with god!" All an atheist could reply is, "I can't say that you are." That's the reply to make to avoid self-contradiction, and contradicting oneself is something no one should accept.

If the gods impressing their admirers so greatly were regarded as part of the wide world, wild and rare yet approachable by the bold and the brave, disinterest in gods would be viewed quite differently. Common sense says that no one can get acquainted with everything, so we each must take our turns to go out and explore what we can. Only the most miserly of minds would refuse to lend some credit to another's sincere story about what was surprisingly seen with one's own eyes. Yet that same common sense also excuses skepticism towards the tale that stretches belief too far. That skepticism becomes all the more reasonable if the tale is about something other-worldly and inaccessible, and especially if other tales disagree. Those knowers of gods know this all too well: their refusal to believe the tales about gods strange to them was religion's original skepticism. While atheists cannot credit any of those tales with knowledge, all those knowers have no right to complain, since they won't call each other knowers, either. By

courtesy they may call each other "believers," well aware that their religions describe gods differently. Each believer thinks that most other believers do not know god. Atheism agrees with every believer about that, observing how no believer knows anything about any god.

No believer wants an atheist to agree with wrong believers, of course. "Why are those other believers wrong?" the atheist asks. Believers have plenty to say about why those other believers are wrong about god. Those would-be knowers assume that some sort of deity is real, so they think that one believer must be wrong if another believer is right, and each believer expects to be more right. Assuming a godly reality lets them think that one can be right to make others wrong. However, people telling each other that they are mistaken about something does not make that thing real. And an atheist saying that would-be knowers are mistaken cannot mean that a god is real. An atheist does not assume any godly reality and does not see how to rightly think about any god, so atheists won't declare which believers are right and which are wrong. Atheism is not the judgment that believers are all wrong about god—yet atheism does suspect that no one is really acquainted with any god.

Atheists are not rival knowers about gods, so believers should not be so dismayed by atheist doubts. Most believers hear little affirmation from the world's religions, if there are any religions listening to each other. Many believers instead hear denials that they are true believers from followers of different religions. An atheist is unable to credit their belief either, but believers should not complain, since they will not surrender belief no matter how many disagree. Atheists concur that numbers cannot add up to knowledge. Believers forget that rule about knowledge when they suggest that atheists are wrong for being outnumbered. What is believed is more significant than how many believe it. When believers cannot accept each other's ideas about gods, atheism sees how little confidence could be placed in any of them.

Atheism draws a hasty conclusion here, believers protest. Atheism must have some idea of god before saying that believers have little idea of god—how else could atheists see how believers are all so mistaken? Believers think that only someone with more knowledge can show them where they are wrong. But atheism does not say that believers worship the wrong god. Atheism finds that no one knows about gods, including atheists. Believers display their ignorance about gods without anyone's help with the truth. Believers do not feel ignorant, all the same, and they surely won't confess ignorance to other believers or any atheist. Each believer's idea of god seems more valid than those of other religions and those of unbelievers too. Whatever god atheists want to reject is not really like my god, each believer thinks. Can an atheist talk about not knowing about gods while telling believers they have wrong ideas about god? But atheism does not say that atheists are denying the right god. Atheism finds that anyone thinking that they are acquainted with a god does not actually know. Believers can imagine whatever god they like—a fine idea may not be about anything real.

Accusing atheism of trying to know something about god, or knowing nothing of the believer's god, cannot get a believer better acquainted with an actual god. Believers should refocus on whether their preferred idea of god has as much validity as they imagine, since they think that other gods have less reason to exist. Atheism notes the abundant reasons against this or that god, heard from all those believers, so atheism sees no way for any god to have enough reason to exist. Believers in one god are not impressed by how many believers affirm another god, or how fine other gods seem to their followers. Atheism is not impressed by religious believers, either. As for all those gods, every one lacks enough reason to exist, if believers in other gods are taken seriously. Atheism cannot ignore so many reasons, so it finds no god with sufficient reason to be real.

Since atheism shares common ground and consensus with what believers think about each other, and what they think about each other's gods, why do believers view atheism so negatively? Collectively, all believers think that atheism is quite right about almost all of the gods. Still, believers condemn atheists, not so much for ignoring the right god (like so many other believers already do), but mostly for telling them that they are wrong. That's taking things personally. It is nothing personal for atheism and its reasoning against the gods. That reasoning is sharpened now, but most of it was first fashioned by believers, wielding reasons against each other's gods. Believers of one religion won't accept the next religion's revelations, or miracles, or prophets, or creation tales, and on and on. To this day, there are far more believers than atheists standing up to say why this or that god is unreal.

Above that noisy clamor, the gods seem undisturbed. They are seemingly so immune to criticism that they feel little need to show themselves to believers. That's no great inconvenience for believers, who praise the hiddenness and mystery of god in private, and then denounce the blindness of atheism in public. But atheism was first to see clearly how mystery completely obscures all gods. Atheism denies gods, not mystery. Atheism is the only viewpoint on divinity that maintains consistency about mystery. Each believer is inconsistent by saying, "My god is mysterious indeed, but you must hear about what this god does . . ." As for atheism, (1) the divine and mystery are so indistinguishable that no one encounters a god, (2) no one really knows about gods, and (3) there are few or no objective reasons to think any gods are real. Let "knowers" of a god defend their alleged knowledge—atheist critiques deflate those claims. However, many religious followers earn the label of "believer" by agreeing with atheism on all three counts, while remaining religious about mystery for reasons of their own. Atheism would have little quarrel with believers except for the way that believers have a proclivity for berating any atheist daring to think they are mistaken.

Atheism is not wrong about the way that believers must have their personal reasons for their religiosity. That is how so much religiosity is easily explained. Once again, atheism needs little originality, as the psychological causes sufficient to make people religious were long ago discovered and

refined by religions. Although explaining the existence of believers is not atheism's responsibility, atheism can perceive how believers are attracted to religions crafted to attract them, without any actual gods involved. When a believer finds some notion of a god to be satisfying, and finds the company of like-minded believers pleasant too, that is a good enough explanation for believers as far as atheism can see. Everything that each believer thinks about their preferred god must truly be a fine reason for devout belief. Are not the right signs obvious? "The history of our religion is so old." "The healings of our man-god are so miraculous." "The prophecies of our religion are so accurate." "The copies of our scriptures are so numerous." "The leaders of our religion are so holy." "The temples of our religion are so magnificent." "The rulers of our religion are so victorious." None of these signs are good reasons to accept any god, not because atheism says so, but because religions do not take them to be decisive reasons. No religion would agree that the religion able to point to the oldest dateable fragment of scripture, or the most miraculous healing, is the religion worshipping the true god. There is no religion telling its followers, "When you find some other religion with more true prophecies than ours, switch to that faith." Plenty of religions can claim an ancient heritage, recount astounding prophecies, point to holy men and women, and so on. Convincing signs of a god are only compelling to believers already convinced.

Atheism never denied that believers have their attractive reasons for affirming this god or that god, as preference may dictate. That ideal match between one's view of god and one's individual needs shows how gods are fashioned for believers. One's god, and one's faith in that god, should seem reasonable—who would worship an unworthy deity? Atheism explains religiosity as believers do, pointing out how each believer's god is mysterious except for its appealing features and deeds, so that signs of each religion's god seem evident enough to its followers. Why then do religions view atheism so negatively? Each religion explains the existence of rival religions by pointing out their regrettably tempting views on divinity, and atheism accepts that method for explaining all religions. Collectively, all religions have to admit that atheism is right about most believers. Each religion, of course, would deny that subjective reasons entirely explain its own followers. Leaving the credibility of a religion to individual preference abandons that religion's fate to shifting social trends and new religious ideas. Only the right reasons, reasons rightly credible to any right-thinking individual, are essential to our religion, as each religion tells its story. On that story, other religions about different gods offer few right reasons, or nothing but wrong reasons, leaving their followers in the dark about the real god. Those godly reasons that rightly convince true believers have their personal appeal, but those godly reasons distinguish true religion. The high fidelity from a religion's followers is their harmonious affirmation of a god fulfilling all the right reasons to be real.

A religion depicting the conviction of its followers as mere belief for no good reason, or as faith in what must be unreasonable, is a religion relying

on a false façade to distract unbelievers. Atheists do get distracted by that façade, aiming their dismay at any religiosity faithful enough to be beyond reason. Public defenders of religion then have a convenient way to throw doubts at atheism, pointing out how it is atheists who are unreasonable for oddly expecting reasons to have any bearing on faith. As for a religion's message to its own followers, no false front gets in the way of the good news that unquestionable facts declare the glory of god. Godly reasons are always available to answer any follower's questions about the scriptures and the signs, while unreasonable people flee from true faith. Questioning is not a sin, but rejecting the right answers must be. That is why religion distinguishes between two kinds of unbelievers: the reasonable doubters who need a closer acquaintance with religious answers, and the unreasonable deniers who willfully reject the right answers. Doctrinal religions can each say, "Let atheism dismiss the believers of wrong religions just as we do, by pointing out misguided personal reasons and mistaken godly reasons, but atheism must stop at the sight of our truly godly reasons." But what exactly does atheism see here?

Atheism first observes how mystery gets pushed to the background by religion so that god's evident reasonableness is foremost for believers. Atheism secondly observes how each religion tries to conveniently pair an eminently reasonable god with its godly reasons for being real. And atheism next observes how doctrinal religions still struggle with keeping popular godly belief aligned with refined godly doctrine, while wrangling over doctrinal issues from time to time. Those signs so convincing to the faithful can point them in too many directions. The religion proud of its ancient scriptures has to choose among interpretations to discrepant narratives. The religion proud of its inspired prophets has to rank their prophecies according to divine urgency. The religion proud of its age-old rituals has to compel conformity with standard forms. Religions as practiced are far more about human decisions than divine directives, but the latest ecclesiastical consensus is presented as eternal doctrine to each generation of followers.

If god is supposed to be so mysterious, or god is supposedly so evident, why would a religion suffer from any doctrinal difficulties, or have to worry about rival religions? Devotees of doctrine are free to reassert god's mysteries, dissolving religion into mysticism beyond mythic rivalries and religious boundaries—out where atheism can welcome some quiet company. To the doctrinal devotees pronouncing how their religion's godly doctrines are so reasonable, atheism must ask why the doctrines of rival religions are less than reasonable, since those religions also match their godly reasons to their reasonable deity.

Atheism has heard the doctrinal religions explaining why their godly reasons are more reasonable than the reasons invoked by other religions. These religions cannot regard all religions' godly reasons as quite reasonable, since the point of comparing godly reasons is not to worship so many gods, and atheism won't disagree about that. With the stark contrasts among all

doctrinal religions arranged for general view, atheism at last observes how every doctrine is challengeable on many sides as unreasonable. Atheism therefore sensibly agrees with the collective verdict of doctrinal religions that no godly reason appears to be sufficiently reasonable. If there is a heavenly god, there is no earthly reason how any religious believer could know that. But atheism will be sternly warned by any doctrinal religion that no skepticism will be heard from unbelievers so blind as to not see how its own real god really fits such reasonable doctrines. With that warning, the doctrinal religions can voice their agreement—that atheism is the viewpoint lacking vision—and believers are accordingly told that unbelievers have nothing but poor personal reasons for stubbornly shutting their eyes. That story is comfortingly familiar to believers to account for the persistence of other religions, and no religion bothers to make up a new story when tradition works. Nonbelievers have to defend themselves against accusations of degeneracy, perversity, and irrationality, forcing atheism to tell a counternarrative about all the normalcies to living a nonreligious life.

The devotees of refined doctrine who admit their own discomfort with that basis to atheism's skepticism—too many godly reasons from so many religions—turn their thoughts in a different direction. Godly reasons satisfying common expectations from ready believers do ensure that believers are reasonable by a religion's standards. Yet those standards are underappreciated by other religions' believers and by unbelievers, who should not be labeled as degenerate, perverse, or irrational. A religion's devotees may therefore ask how their godly reasons can gain broader reasonableness. Additional grounds in support of godly reasons are either higher godly reasons, or they are not basically about gods. Appealing to higher godly reasons, chosen for their plausibility to some other religions, only lends temporary advantage. A religion saying, "Mightiness in war shows how our god is truly caring for his people," will make sense to other religions expecting their gods to defend their peoples, and the religion of an expanding empire will accumulate converts. That higher godly reason proves to be a double-edge sword, however, carving up that religion when the empire eventually falls. A religion saying, "Exemplifying pure love is a worthy god's quality, so our loving god is truly real," will make sense to other religions attributing love to their gods, and the religion embodying divine love can attract converts. That higher godly reason proves to be a unifying quality indeed, when another religion prioritizes it and engulfs the first religion. No final advantage would be held by that religion appealing to the vaguest qualities ('supreme', 'absolute', 'infinite', 'pure spirit', 'perfection', and the like) since the world's believers could not be expected to think about such concepts in the same way, even if they happened to mouth the same words. Devotees of refined doctrine picking out persuasive higher godly reasons and regulating their meanings—these devotees are sometimes called "theologians"—enjoy permanent employment in that role. Atheism has no role to play in all these godly engagements, seeing no good reason to submit to

a vast religion or a vague religion, an aloofness shared by believers of small and specific religions.

Nonreligious grounds present doctrinal religions with greater opportunities and deeper threats. They are opportunities, because other believers and nonbelievers can accept them for their own merits, yet they are threats as well, since nonreligious grounds can seem anti-religious for their independence. Independent grounds are by definition available to all religions, and atheism as well. The logical rules allowing atheism's skepticism—disagreement makes nothing real, numbers are not knowledge, do not believe contradictory views, and refrain from belief while equal reasons are opposed—are classifiable as independent grounds. Grounds appropriated as already religious, and grounds intrinsically opposed to religion, lack the needed independence to reasonably support doctrine or deny doctrine. Many mundane matters about the world and life are candidates for service as independent grounds, but they are not equally useful. Grounds agreeable to most people could serve well—their clear support for this or that godly reason lends some independent reasonableness. Religions able to connect several broadly independent grounds with important godly reasons can stand out in the religious crowd.

However, independent grounds may also fail to connect. Disconnections and discrepancies between broadly independent grounds and core godly reasons will not go unnoticed for long. Non-doctrinal religions tend to regard most aspects of life as religious in one way or another, so few disconnections could trouble them, but they cannot distinguish themselves, either. As for doctrinal religions looking for independent support, theologians can watch for discordant disconnections without any assistance from atheism, although atheism's own devotees—let them be labeled as "atheologians"—take note of those disconnections as well. Doctrinal religions cannot come to an agreement that one religion among them best connects broadly independent grounds to its core godly reasons. Atheism arrives at that same assessment. Atheologians cannot see much solidity to attempted connections by any religions, detecting more artifice than substance at best and sharp discrepancies at worst.

To distract attention away from discrepancies with independent grounds, theologians argue that atheism gains no support from those grounds. Such arguments backfire upon theology. For example, if atheism thinks that nature's order explains what happens in the world, theologians are ready to credit a supreme organizer for such perfect order. When atheism replies that there is not enough regular order to credit a god, other theologians are ready to label any gaps in that natural order as divine interventions. No matter what nature does, theology demands the right to "explain" nature with a god, while denying that nature lends plausibility to atheism, which asks for nothing more than nature as it is. Another example is the way that theology complains that atheism's admission that unknowable reality lies beyond known nature leaves atheism as less than intelligible. Yet theology cannot let

nature be fundamental, so it postulates a mysteriously supernatural ground behind all nature known and unknown, which is supposed to make religion more intelligible. Atheology can only observe that theology would be wiser to focus on its own capacity to gain reasonable support from independent grounds.

Despite that atheological advice, theology is tempted to condemn the ground under atheism, as if atheism were a rival religion to be cursed. Although doctrinal religions cannot converge on the best way to support godly reasons with independent grounds, they can share a suspicion that atheism guards independent grounds too zealously. If religion is vulnerable to a disconnection between its godly reasons and an independent ground, its theologians could respond to this threat by treating that ground as atheistically anti-religious, thus denying its independence and dismissing its relevance. For example, if a religion's theologians say that logical rules—about disagreement, contradiction and opposition, for example—are anti-religious, in order to exempt that religion from scrutiny on those grounds, then atheism might lose a crucial basis for doubting this religion. This sort of tactic does not make a religion more reasonable, however.

First, atheism cannot see why the simplest rules of rationality (or other mundane matters) have to be essentially anti-religious. Second, an allegedly "anti-religious" ground according to one religion would remain an independent ground for other religions that thereby gain an argumentative advantage. Third, there is no earthly ground condemned by most religions as "anti-religious," so the religions pointing at anti-religious grounds are evidently projecting their own doctrinal weaknesses. Fourth, many independent grounds are widely accepted around the world by believers and unbelievers alike as good common sense, so any religion condemning some of those grounds will be widely viewed as less reasonable, not more. These four considerations have not prevented some theologians from pursuing the tactic of condemning neutral grounds, but it is a dead-end. The doctrinal religion that retreats into doctrinal solitude, telling its believers to close their ears and their minds to an "anti-religious" world, deprives its godly reasons of independent reasonableness. By contrast, the doctrinal religion that gradually adapts its doctrines to suit widely-accepted independent grounds will open minds that once were closed. Atheologians could not refuse their help with that reasonable development. Theologians who feel that religions need less certainty have more company than they might think.

2 Atheists and Atheism

Atheology is the exploration and justification of atheism. Like any '-logy' it defines its central terms to clearly state and explain its positions. This chapter clarifies the meanings of 'atheist' and 'atheism'; Chapter 3 outlines the intimate relationships between atheology and theology; and Chapter 4 sketches primary ways that atheology justifies atheism. Atheology clarifies atheist unbelief about gods, analyzes and criticizes theological views defending convictions about gods, and assembles arguments defending atheism's judgment that it is unreasonable for anyone to think that a god is real. Systematic atheology, of which this book is an exemplar, organizes the philosophically sophisticated challenges to theism, and concludes that attending to gods has nothing to do with being a reasonable and well-informed person, a moral member of society, and a responsible citizen. Four main methods of philosophical atheology, outlined in the fourth chapter and discussed separately in later chapters, focus on establishing the reasonableness of atheism through appeals to logical reason, current science, sound morality, and good civics. These atheological methods can operate independently, but they can be conducted in concert for a comprehensive atheology, as this volume illustrates in a systematic way, which in turn permits the construction of a complete atheology, discussed in the final chapter.

Nonreligious people take little notice of atheology, even if they might give some thought to atheism. Religious people need not be theological adepts, either. There is far more to religiosity than theology or even theism, and much more to secularity than atheology or atheism. Questioning which god(s) are real, or doubting whether any gods are real, can attract plenty of attention in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, the gods are not everything. Contrasting religiosity with secularity, and discerning their innumerable entanglements here on earth, is a vaster undertaking for multi-faceted inquiries across shifting social conditions and intertwined cultural features. Atheism is not the same as secularity or secularism. However, atheological positions support secularism's stands on restraining the power of religion in society and politics, and protecting the right to dissent from religion.[1]

Atheology endorses unbelief, and notes how hundreds of millions of people around the world are disconnected from religion and disinterested in gods. The field of secular studies is the broader interdisciplinary area of research into the psychological, social, cultural, and political phenomena associated with nonbelief, secularity, secularization, and disengagement from religion.[2] Secular studies include the effort to track the kinds and numbers of atheists, and the demographics of nonreligious people more generally, and it sometimes offers demographic predictions about the future number of atheists.[3] Religious scholars and theologians have a more venerable, but less objective, tradition of investigating kinds and causes of unbelief.[4] Where secularity is growing, atheology is put to more use, but atheology is not dependent on the plausibility of theories about secularization.[5] Attention to atheology also rises when outspoken atheists gain public attention, such as the movement called New Atheism,[6] and nonreligious people are inspired to tell their stories about leaving religion and living secular lives.[7] Atheology can appeal to naturalistic explanations for religiosity, so it attends to scientific accounts of religious experience and religion's origins and development.[8]

Atheism and Theism

The view among religion scholars that atheism's meaning is determined by the meaning of theism is often stated *ex cathedra* as self-evident and unchallengeable. What is atheism except contra-theism? Mere semantics can conceal false assumptions. It is not the case that whatever atheism is now, or what atheism was during a past era, must only be the denial of whatever theism is, or has been. That assumption is falsifiable, and in fact it is historically false.

What has counted as theism, and what god is supposed to be, has gradually changed in the West, and especially within Christianity. Thinking that such changes were self-caused, that theism developed from its own inner entelechy without external stimulus, is theological dogma. The historical reality is that intellectual conceptions, re-formulations, and creative speculations about god across the centuries and millennia were often provoked by contextual factors of dissent and disbelief. The theism of one era typically developed in response to standing resistance from a previous era. Each successive version of theism was indebted to earlier versions of atheism as well as earlier forms of theism. Plato's supernaturalism dealt with Presocratic skepticism targeted at traditional gods of mythic poetry. Several Church theologians relied on philosophical debates about godly matters almost as much as they depended on their scripture. The rise of natural theology during 1650–80 was a response to the emergence of soulless materialism, and then the moralistic atheism of the mid-1700s was directed largely against natural theology. Many more illustrations of this theism-atheism co-dependency are recounted in this book's chapters.

Theism does not shape atheism like an object casts its shadow. Presuming that the atheism of any era consists of whatever theologians find darkly heretical is poor historiography. Philosophy has a deeper sense of history. Atheism will object to whatever god(s) that theism happens to affirm, but theism has affirmed doctrines designed for responding to atheist objections. Contemporary atheism is far from just the denial of today's theologically approved deities, because its atheological position embodies millennia of thoughtful dissents from every sort of god. Theism today is far from the affirmation of what god must always have been, because its theological god incorporates that extended process of reasoning with atheism.

Due to their parallel roles with explicating unbelief and belief, atheology and theology tend to track and match each other's positions as decades and centuries pass. Those positionings and counter-positionings across so much time have often settled into mutual patterns of provocation and response, developing into an ever-evolving dance and symbiotic dependency. Structural parallels between atheology and theology should be expected, and they are signs of common functions. Both theology and atheology rely on intellectual explications, for enriching their respective religious and secular bases, and those explications are thoroughly indebted to the expressions of opposed views.

Theology and atheology are complicated, but being an atheist has always been straightforward. Gods come and go, but the core definition to an atheist has not changed since the days of the ancient Greeks. Atheists do not think that there are any gods. And, if it is necessary to add, they do not think that they are being unreasonable about that dissent. (By contrast, someone feeling unreasonable for not believing is not an atheist and cannot be associated with atheism.) Atheism, as befits an 'ism', upholds a position: anyone's convictions affirming a god are less than reasonable, so people should live a godless life instead.

Godlessness and atheism are not modernist notions. Sporadic questioning of the gods can be heard in preserved writings and religious literature all the way back to early civilizations.[9] Doubts do not amount to atheism, however. Where can atheology be found? Historians confess difficulties with identifying nonreligious philosophical systems. They have difficulty even identifying atheist philosophers. "Not before Nietzsche," says one; "None before Marx," says another. Those who cannot remember much history might at least recall Friedrich Nietzsche's atheist pronouncement that "God is dead." Nietzsche announced this provocation in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (The Gay Science, 1882), but his book credited Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) as the first openly atheist philosopher in Germany. Although European existentialists had a proclivity for approaching atheology, Jean-Paul Sartre perceived little prior to his own existentialism: "it seemed to me that a great atheist, truly atheist philosophy was something philosophy lacked" (de Beauvoir 1984, 436). Yet Sartre's own communist sympathies should have brought at least one exemplar to his mind: communist Karl

Marx (1818–83). No atheistic philosophy existed before Marx's generation, declares James Mackey (2000, 26). Yet Marx himself knew well the revolutionary atheism of *Das Wesen des Christentums* (The Essence of Christianity, 1841) by Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72). Did the 1830s or 1840s witness the birth of authentic atheism?

Philosophy has a longer memory than most academic histories. What about English feminist Frances Wright? Her 1829 public lectures across America delivered resounding atheist, feminist, and socialist stances against religion and its faults, shocking both sides of the Atlantic and provoking prompt theological responses. Minister and Oxford classicist Benjamin Godwin took notice, but his *Lectures on the Atheistic Controversy* (1834) selected a different target for refutation in the name of Christianity. Godwin chose the notorious atheist Mirabaud, whose treatise *Systeme de la nature* (1770) represented atheism in the eyes of theologians long before they heard of Marx. This Mirabaud was the pseudonym of Paul Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723–89), a philosopher espousing materialism, whose audacious atheism astonished Europe before David Hume's skeptical work, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), was posthumously published. Hume would not openly defend atheism, although he did confirm its logical basis, the impossibility of knowing that god exists. But Hume was acutely aware of a bolder philosophy: the materialism and anti-theism of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). Another philosophical authority of that era, Bishop George Berkeley, identified Hobbes as an unmistakable atheist in his book *Alciphron* (1732).

Cambridge philosopher Ralph Cudworth agreed about Hobbes's atheism, but his treatise *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) opposed the atheist philosophers of ancient Greece, especially the atomist Epicurus (third century BCE). Theophilus Spizelius's *De atheismi radice* (1666) had already deplored Epicurean atheism, pairing it with Machiavelli's political atheism as the most pernicious heresies. The idea that gods were invented for civic ends did not originate with Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), as he well knew, having studied Epicurus and Greek philosophy for himself. Epicurus and his devoted Roman poet Lucretius (first century BCE) appear on almost every list of atheists assembled by Medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment theologians. Before Epicurus, the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle (fourth century BCE) designed philosophical systems that included a place for a god knowable to philosophy but not traditional religion. They regarded popular religion as ignorant myth, well aware that earlier Greek philosophers such as Protagoras (fifth century BCE) had already raised strong doubts about all gods. Those early philosophers could also look back further in time to the dawn of philosophy, where cosmologies such as the one framed by Anaximander (sixth century BCE) gave no place for gods to do anything and left no reason to be religious.

Although this book focuses on atheology and atheism as they developed in Western thought, skeptical stances towards deities and philosophical

statements of atheism can be found in the ancient world from Egypt and Persia to India and China. Eastern atheology, when it is systematically explored, will prove to be just as sophisticated and multi-faceted as Western atheology. Doubts about the gods are voiced in the earliest Hindu Vedic literature, the *Ṛg Veda*. Early Buddhism and Jainism took no interest in a supreme deity, and some schools of Confucian thought had little practical use for gods, heavens, or immortality. In Muslim and Hindu regions, minority traditions of freethought and secularity are not unknown to this day.[10]

The Atheist in the Ancient World

Words for 'atheist' and 'atheism' are far older than the Renaissance, or even European civilization, and Enlightenment thinkers did not have to invent their meanings. The singular word 'atheist' has its linguistic heritage in ancient Greek. The Greek word was ἄθεος—a-theos—meaning without god, or godless. This term *atheos* did double duty, signifying one's separation from the gods, and one's breach from religion. As a rupture or violation, *atheos* was never a good thing, and this unfortunate condition was connected, in the Greek way of thinking, with another dangerous character flaw of being proudly arrogant, which the Greeks called *hubris*. The word *atheos* pre-dates both Greek philosophy and Greek theology (their intellectual origins are recounted in Chapter 4), by appearing with the dawning of literary achievement from the Greeks. It is used by two of the greatest Greek writers of the fifth century BCE: Aeschylus the dramatist and Pindar the poet.

The term *atheos* is in the oldest theatrical drama to survive from ancient Greece: the tragic play of Aeschylus (c.525–c.456 BCE) titled *The Persians*, performed in 472 BCE. It is used in its adjective genitive plural form as κἀθέων, modifying the Greek word φρονημάτων (phronematon), and appearing together as κἀθέων φρονημάτων—*katheon phronematon*, meaning godless thoughts, or ungodly intents. The Loeb Classical Library and subsequent translations of *The Persians* translate *katheon* as 'impious' when it is used by the ghost of King Darius to explain why he doubts that the remnants of his son's defeated Persian army will return home from Greece.

> μίμνουσι δ᾽ ἔνθα πεδίον Ἀσωπὸς ῥοαῖς
> ἄρδει, φίλον πίασμα Βοιωτῶν χθονί:
> οὗ σφιν κακῶν ὕψιστ᾽ ἐπαμμένει παθεῖν,
> ὕβρεως ἄποινα κἀθέων φρονημάτων:
> οἳ γῆν μολόντες Ἑλλάδ᾽ οὐ θεῶν βρέτη
> ἠδοῦντο συλᾶν οὐδὲ πιμπράναι νεώς:
> βωμοὶ δ᾽ ἄιστοι, δαιμόνων θ᾽ ἱδρύματα
> πρόρριζα φύρδην ἐξανέστραπται βάθρων.
>
> They are now lingering where the plain is watered by the stream of Asopus which nourishes Boeotia's fields.
> Here they will meet their crowning disaster in requital for their

> presumptuous pride and impious thoughts.
> For, on reaching the land of Hellas, restrained by no religious awe,
> they ravaged the images of the gods and set fire to their temples.
> Altars have been destroyed, statues of the gods have been
> thrown from their bases in utter ruin and confusion.[11]

Soldiers in an Iron Age army would not show much reverence towards an enemy's gods, but the spiteful destruction of local holy sites was then, and remains to this day, a barbaric assault on civilization itself.

Darius's lines were not calling those soldiers atheists, of course. Disdain for foreign gods is not the same as dismissing all gods. But atheists are brought up earlier in this drama, as the Messenger relates one of the many deadly hazards encountered by the retreating army. The lines that Aeschylus gives to the Messenger say that some soldiers were unbelievers, at least until death seemed near. Are there any atheists in foxholes? Nor for Aeschylus:

> νυκτὶ δ᾽ ἐν ταύτῃ θεὸς
> χειμῶν᾽ ἄωρον ὦρσε, πήγνυσιν δὲ πᾶν
> ῥέεθρον ἁγνοῦ Στρυμόνος. θεοὺς δέ τις
> τὸ πρὶν νομίζων οὐδαμοῦ τότ᾽ ηὔχετο
> λιταῖσι, γαῖαν οὐρανόν τε προσκυνῶν.[12]

Two modern translations yield the same story about these unbelievers:

> It was that night some god
> blew down winter out of season and
> froze holy Strymōn bank to bank. Then any man
> who'd once thought gods were nothing
> sought them out, praying, begging as he lay face down before Earth and Sky.

> There in the night a god
> roused winter out of season, and
> froze solid the stream of holy Strymon:
> all who had believed the gods were naught
> now sang their prayers, making obeisance both to Earth and Sky.[13]

Whatever one may think about atheists actually praying for their lives, a real encounter with unbelievers in fifth century Greece was no myth to Aeschylus.

Sporadic appearances of the adjectival word 'atheon' appear in other works of Greek literature from the fifth century BCE. For example, Aeschylus's "Eumenides" (performed in 458 BCE) depicts a trial of Orestes accusing him of impiety with the words ἄθεον (line 151) and δυσσεβείας (line 533, cognate of ἀσεβέω, meaning irreverence, ungodliness). Aeschylus's contemporary Pindar (c.522–c.443 BCE) used the term ἄθεον in one of his odes, Pythian 4 for Arcesilas of Cyrene (462 BCE), to describe impious or ungodly weapons (line 162). A play of Sophocles, "Trachiniae" (c.445–430

BCE, line 1036), uses the word to describe an impious mother. During the fifth century BCE, an author could be understood by audiences as referring to unbelieving people taking no notice of gods, and also to impious people who are willfully sacrilegious. No single word was available in Greek for just unbelief as distinguished from impiety, which is an understandable linguistic situation. An author would have to use a phrase such as "believes there are no gods" as a descriptive term instead of 'impious' in order to specifically refer to unbelievers.

Some Presocratic philosophers expressed their doubts that any gods exist and they derided popular religion, yet none of them resorted to using the terms *atheon* or *atheos* to describe themselves or others, at least in their surviving works. The ascription of impiety was a serious matter. Plato brought the topic of atheism as well as impiety to the forefront with his account of the trial of Socrates in the *Apology* (c.390 BCE). One of the accusers, Meletus, admits that Socrates is suspected of not just impiety towards the gods of his homeland, but also that Socrates is entirely godless, παράπαν ἄθεος, by not recognizing any gods at all (26c). Plato's dialogue *Laws* (c.350 BCE) demands strict intolerance towards people who do not believe that any gods exist. Such people are collectively labeled as ἄθεοι in Book 10, and Plato precisely defines atheists (and not just the impious) as those who wholeheartedly disbelieve all gods and think that all things are empty of gods (Laws 908b-c). Readers of these Platonic passages in the ancient world, such as Cicero and Plutarch, understood that clear definition of an atheist.

The Atheist in the Renaissance World

The ability to read Greek was reviving in Europe's centers of learning after 1400, growing along with the wider distribution of manuscript copies of Plato's dialogues and other major Greek writers. As a result, the dual significance of ἄθεος was increasingly appreciated.

Ficino's *Platonis Opera Omnia* in 1484 did not use the transliteration *atheos* for his Latin translation, avoiding a transfer into Latin of that ambiguity in Greek between impiety or unbelief. He used familiar Latin words for impiety where impiety is meant in the Greek original, and he used descriptive phrases for atheism, showing how he knew the difference between them, just as Plato did. This was common knowledge among Plato's translators. Compare three widely-consulted translations of Plato's *Apology*, at 26c and 26e where Socrates elicits unequivocal accusations of complete unbelief, translated by Ficino, Serre, and Fowler:

Apology, at 26c:

> (Meletus) Ταῦτα λέγω, ὡς τὸ παράπαν οὐ νομίζεις θεούς. (Loeb Library edition)

(Meletus) Affero equídem te omníno negare deos. (26c, Ficino translation, Florence edition of 1484)

(Meletus) Hoc dico te existimare, nullos esse deos. (26c, Jean de Serre translation, Stephanus edition of 1578)

Meletus: That is what I say, that you do not believe in gods at all. (26c, Fowler translation, Loeb Library edition of 1914)

Apology, at 26e:

(Socrates) ὦ πρὸς Διός, οὐτωσί σοι δοκῶ; οὐδένα νομίζω θεὸν εἶναι; (Meletus) οὐ μέντοι μὰ Δία οὐδ᾽ ὁπωστιοῦν. (26e, Loeb Library edition)

(Socrates) Sed per deum o Melíte, putas ne reuera nullum me deum existimare? (Meletus) Nullŭ per Ioué. (26e, Ficino translation, Florence edition of 1484)

Socrates: Verùm per Iouem, dic mihi Melite, arbitrarísne me existimare nullum esse Deum? Meletus: Arbitror, nec ullo quidé omnino modo. (26e, Jean de Serre translation, Stephanus edition of 1578)

Socrates: But for heaven's sake, do you think this of me, that I do not believe there is any god? Meletus: No, by Zeus, you don't, not in the least. (26e, Fowler translation, Loeb Library edition of 1914)

The descriptive phrasings such as "nullos esse deos" are not evasive circumlocutions. They are not due to a translator's unfamiliarity with the concept of complete unbelief, or a translator's abhorrence of atheism or the word 'atheist', or a translator's confusion about what ἄθεος or *atheos* might mean, or a translator's worry that readers would not understand the idea of an atheist. Quite the opposite: translators were able to accurately convey who an atheist really is. The Stephanus edition even supplied a marginal note about Plato's use of ἄθεος for the reader's edification.[14] Historians supposing that the early Renaissance period had no access to an unequivocal meaning to 'atheist' forget about Plato.[15]

The Bible was less illuminating by comparison. The only use of ἄθεοι in the Bible occurs in Ephesians, and this letter's author (like the author of Colossians, to which Ephesians is closely related) was evidently acquainted with Greek philosophy and Plato's term. Ephesians 2:12 is referring to people as godless prior to their Christian conversion, so it is not narrowly referring to only nonreligious people. The Latin Vulgate translation for ἄθεοι uses the phrase *sine deo in hoc mundo*, "without God in the world," to indicate infidel non-Christians, following Augustine's use of that phrase in his commentaries on the Bible. Erasmus's edition of the New Testament in Greek and Latin (1519) uses the phrasing *deóque carentes in mundo* (without a god in the world). Perhaps Erasmus thought to cover both nonbelievers in any god as well as believers in other gods besides God with that phrasing. Erasmus was acquainted with the concept of atheism from the early years of his academic career. Besides reading Plato on the topic of atheism, he could

note Plutarch's definition of atheism. He absorbed Plutarch's *Moralia* and assisted with its 1509 publication, and subsequently translated some of its essays and apophthegmata into Latin. Erasmus also admired Cicero, so he was able to peruse what Cicero could convey about atheism.[16]

Erasmus's learning was vast for his time, but he was hardly the only scholar to meet with the idea of atheism. Even if a European intellectual living during the late 1400s or early 1500s did not encounter Plato, it would have been difficult to avoid an acquaintance with Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, Aelianus, or Plutarch. These ancient authors wrote works that included representations and definitions of authentic atheism, and not just impiety or heresy.

Cicero uses *atheos* in *De natura deorum* (On the Nature of the Gods) to identify "Diagoras the Atheist" and Theodorus as deniers of god, and adds that Protagoras of Abdera doubted that it could be known whether gods exist or not. *De natura deorum*, which was consulted by several early Christian theologians including Augustine, also features the verdict against Epicureanism that it does not accept the existence of gods. *On the Nature of the Gods* resurfaced in the late 1400s and several Latin editions were available by the 1520s, providing expansive insights into the materialism of Epicureanism and the quasi-pantheism of Stoicism for Renaissance minds already familiarized with Thomism. Additional information about atomism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism could be read in Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers* (first printing in 1533), which outlines materialistic and skeptical stances towards gods. This book also mentions the Cyrenaic philosopher Theodorus, "known as the atheist." Two early Church Fathers who accessed Cicero repeated those accusations of atheism. Arnobius of Sicca's *Adversus Gentes* (Against the Pagans, c.303 CE) surfaced in a Latin edition in 1542. Dozens of editions and printings followed over the next century. In the fifth book of his treatise, Arnobius uses *atheum* while explaining what atheism is:

> . . . atheum, irreligiosum, sacrilegum, qui Deos esse omnino aut negent, aut dubitent: aut qui eos homines fuisse contendant, & potestatis alicuius, & meriti causa Deorum in numerum relatos . . .
>
> . . . atheists, impious, sacrilegious, who either deny that there are any gods at all, or doubt their existence, or assert that they were men, and have been numbered among the gods for the sake of some power and good desert . . .[17]

Lactantius, Arnobius's student, also challenged philosophical atheism and used the term *atheos*. His work *De ira Dei* (On the Anger of God, 313 CE) repeats the attribution of atheism to Diagoras and Theodorus, and conducts a lengthy prosecution of Epicurus for denying the existence of true gods, objecting that Epicurean gods are too isolated and aloof to be authentic deities.

If one's interests at that time leaned more towards natural history or intellectual history than philosophy and theology, Aelianus and Plutarch were more digestible. The accessibility of *Varia Historia* by Aelianus (c.175–c.235 CE) expanded with the Rome edition of 1545. It yields diverting and dubious tales interspersed with plain-spoken observations on the world. On the topic of religion, he found enough religion in "barbarians," as he called them, since "none of them have fallen into any atheism [ἀθεότητα], or question whether there are Gods or not, and whether they take care of us or not."[18]

Writing in Greek, Plutarch (c.46–120 CE) used the words ἄθεος and ἀθεότης with the same meanings as Plato in his essay *Peri deisidaimonias* (On Superstition, one of the *Moralia* essays), which could be read in Europe after its first Greek printing in 1509. Plutarch says that superstitious people wish there were no gods, but as for atheists, Οὐκ οἴεται θεοὺς εἶναι ὁ ἄθεος—"The atheist thinks there are no gods" (at 170f, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt 1926, Loeb Library edition, p. 491). Plutarch's essay on superstition was treated differently because it was translated into Latin later than almost all of his other essays. Plutarch's *Lives* were usually published separately from his other surviving essays (or *opuscula*, around 60 total), which were collectively called the *Moralia*, or moral essays. During the Renaissance, typical editions of the *Moralia* in Latin, French, English, and other vernacular languages only published selected essays. Not until the 1570s could Latin readers access all of the *Moralia*, including *De Superstitione*. Although Erasmus treasured Plutarch and read *Peri deisidaimonias*, he did not attempt a translation of it. The collection of essays in the Latin edition titled *Opuscula (quæ quidem extant) omni, undequaque collecta* (Basel 1530) did not include the superstition essay.

John Cheke's translation of Plutarch's essay in 1540 into Latin as *De Superstitione*, a manuscript presented to England's King Henry VIII, was never published. Cheke was appointed that same year as the first regius chair of Greek at Oxford University, where the manuscript was deposited. One of Cheke's colleagues at Oxford was Thomas Harding, the regius chair of Hebrew. Harding appears to have been the first to use 'atheism' in print in England. His tract *A Confutation of a booke intituled An apologie of the Church of England* (1565) laments "such confusion of opinions and infinite varietie of doctrines, as breedeth in the people a mere paganisme, heathenish loosnes, and a very Epicurian atheism."[19]

A Latin translation of most of the *Moralia* was published (Cologne 1542 and Paris 1544) as *Ethica, seu Moralia Opuscula*, but this volume did not include *De Superstitione*. Thomas Kirchmaier (Thoma Naogeorgo) published a Latin translation of *De Superstitione* in his volume titled *Plutarchi Chaeronensis summi Philosophi, Libelli septem* (Basel 1556). This translation was included in a volume of the Stephanus edition, *Plutarchi Chaeronensis, Opuscula varia: quæ magna ex parte sunt philosophica* (Geneva 1572) edited by Henri Etienne (Henricus Stephanus). Another translation

appeared in 1573: Hermann Cruser (Cruserio/Cruserius) translated *De Superstitione* for inclusion in *Plutarchi Chaeronei Ethica, sive Moralia Opera, quae extant, omnia* (Basel 1573), published by Thomas Guarini.[20] For comparison, the passage in which Plutarch speaks of ἀθεότης is followed by its Latin and modern English translations.

> ἡ μὲν ἀθεότης κρίσις οὖσα φαύλη τοῦ μηδὲν εἶναι μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον εἰς ἀπάθειάν τινα δοκεῖ τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ τοῦ θείου περιφέρειν, καὶ τέλος ἐστὶν αὐτῇ τοῦ μὴ νομίζειν θεοὺς τὸ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι
>
> (165c, Loeb Library edition)

> Divinitatis quidem abnegatio, cum iudicium fit vitiosum quòd nulla res fit beata & incorruptibilis, nempe Deus, in indolentiam quandā videtur deducere: eiusq́; finis est, quū nō existimet Deū esse, ut etiam non timeat.
>
> (Naogeorgo 1556, p. 57)

> Igitur etiam ex iis, de quibus sermo est, impietas, quae nihil beatum esse & incorruptum prave iudicat, in quondam indolentiam videtur non credendo numen esse impellere, estque finis ei non putandi esse deum, eum non timere.
>
> (Cruser 1573, p. 314)

> To come now to our subject: atheism, which is a sorry judgement that there is nothing blessed or incorruptible, seems, by disbelief in the Divinity, to lead finally to a kind of utter indifference, and the end which it achieves in not believing in the existence of gods is not to fear them.
>
> (Frank Cole Babbitt 1926, Loeb Library edition, p. 457)[21]

Latin phrases such as *divinitatis quidem abnegatio*, a denial of divinity, convey the idea of atheism so that no transliteration or neologism of a single word is necessary. The transliteration of ἀθεότης is *atheotes*, which translators avoided. However, the appearance of ἄθεος as a singular noun, or ἄθεοι as the plural noun, which also occurs in Plutarch's writings, was eventually transliterated. Neither Naogeorgo nor Cruser resorted to transliteration, instead using *divinitatis quidĕ negator* and *impium* in their translations of *De Superstitione* for those denying divinity, or the ungodly. The translation by Wilhelm Holtzman (Guilelmo Xylander) of Plutarch's *De communibus noticiis adversus Stoicos*, "Against the Stoics," in another volume of the 1572 Stephanus edition transliterated ἄθεοι as *athei* where three philosophers are called atheists. Cruser's 1573 translation of "Against the Stoics" also used *athei* in that passage.

> καὶ ἴσως ἐντύχοι τις ἂν ἔθνεσι βαρβάροις καὶ ἀγρίοις θεὸν μὴ νοοῦσι, θεὸν δὲ νοῶν μὴ νοῶν δ᾽ ἄφθαρτον μηδ᾽ ἀίδιον, ἄνθρωπος; οὐδὲ εἷς γέγονεν. οἱ γοῦν

> ἄθεοι προσαγορευθέντες οὗτοι, Θεόδωροι καὶ Διαγόραι καὶ Ἵππωνες, οὐκ ἐτόλμησαν εἰπεῖν τὸ θεῖον ὅτι φθαρτόν ἐστιν
>
> (1075a, Loeb Library edition)

> Ac fieri fanè potest, ut incidat aliquis in homines barbaros & feros, qui Deum esse nullum putent: deum esse qui existimet, sed eundem non fecurum interitus, nō aeternum, inventus est ne unus quidem homo. Certè qui athei appellantur quòd negarent esse deos Theodorus, Diagoras, Hippo: non ausi sunt dicere deum esse interitui obnoxium, sed non crediderunt aliquid esse ab interitu immune
>
> (Holtzman 1572, p. 820)

> Reperias fortassis gentes barbaras & feras, quae nihil de diis sentiant. Sed qui deum concipiat animo esse, nec simul sentiat immortalem & aeternum esse, nullus unquam mortalium extitit. Siquidem qui athei, id est, impii fuerunt dicti, Theodori hi, Diagorae, & Hippones, non induxerunt in animum esse caducum numen
>
> (Cruser 1573, p. 487)

> One might perhaps chance upon barbaric and savage tribes that have no conception of god, but not a single man has there been who having a conception of god did not conceive him to be indestructible and everlasting. At any rate, those who have been called atheists, Theodorus and Diagoras and Hippo and their like, did not venture to say of divinity that it is subject to destruction but did not believe that there is anything indestructible, preserving the preconception of god while not admitting the existence of what is indestructible.
>
> (Harold Cherniss, Loeb Library edition, p. 783)[22]

The translators of Plutarch's essay against the Stoics relayed his thoughts about atheism, which were controversial opinions during the Renaissance: (a) belief in god may not be universal for all peoples, and (b) there have been authentic atheists among philosophers.

That transliteration of *athei* for ἄθεοι was no novelty. As early as 1513, *athei* was used in the Paris edition of Baptista Mantuanus's poems, in the marginal commentary by Sebastian Murrho, Sebastian Brant, and Josse Badius upon Mantuanus's "De morte Federici Spagnoli." Meditating on his brother's death, the poet ponders whether questioning fate is questioning god. The commentary points out how atheists deny that any god reigns, while Epicureans deny that the gods care about mortality.[23]

After the examples of Cruser and Holtzman, vernacular translations of Plutarch's "Against the Stoics" began to use *l'atheiste* and atheism. Amyot's French translation *Oeuvres morales et melées* (1572) was the best vernacular translation and reached the broadest audience of readers. England's foremost translator at the turn of the seventeenth century, Philomon Holland,

produced the first published translation into English of the *Moralia* as *The Philosophie, commonly called, the Morals written by the learned Philosopher Plutarch* (1603). The passage in "On Superstition" where Plutarch defines ἀθεότης is followed by its French and English translations for comparison:

> ἡ μὲν ἀθεότης κρίσις οὖσα φαύλη τοῦ μηδὲν εἶναι μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον εἰς ἀπάθειάν τινα δοκεῖ τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ τοῦ θείου περιφέρειν, καὶ τέλος ἐστὶν αὐτῇ τοῦ μὴ νομίζειν θεοὺς τὸ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι
>
> (165c, Loeb Library edition)

> . . . suffi pour venir à celles dont à présent il est question, l'impieté de l'atheiste est un faulx & mauvais jugement qui luy fait croire qu'il n'y a point de nature souverainernent heureuse & incorruptible, & le conduit par ceste mesereance, à n'en sentir point aussi de passion.
>
> (Amyot, p. 120)

> But now to come unto those which at this present are in question: Impiety or Atheisme, being a false persuasion and lewd beliefe, that there is no sovereigne Nature most happy and incorruptible, seemeth by incredulity of a God-head to bring miscreants to a certaine stupidity, bereaving them of all sense and feeling, considering that the end of this mis-beliefe that there is no God, is to be void altogether of feare.
>
> (Holland)[24]

To summarize this excursion into Renaissance translations, it is evident that Plato, Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, and Plutarch conveyed clear ideas about atheists and atheism into the Renaissance world. Those authors, together with Aristotle, Horace, Seneca, Ovid, and Livy, were essential to the ancient world's dramatic influence on the pliable Renaissance mind. By the late 1500s, educated Europeans could read about people who do not believe in any god and worldviews with no place for gods.[25]

With the growth of scholarship comes an industry of glossaries and dictionaries. Niccolò Perotti's *Cornucopia linguae latinae* (1489) did not include *atheos* or *atheismus*, nor did editions of Johannes Reuchlin's *Vocabularius breviloquus* (1490s), but Calepino's dictionary did. Ambrogio Calepino (Calipinus) compiled his larger Latin dictionary with the title of *Cornucopiæ*, which became among the most reprinted reference works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with later enlarged editions known as the *Dictionarium*. The first edition of 1502 defined *atheos*: *qui negat deũ esse*. The denial of god's existence remained the core to the *Dictionarium* definition. By 1579, its definition was *Impius, qui negat Deum, qui est sine Deo* (impious, who denies God, who is without God). That definition appears in further printings including the 1609 edition. For comparison, the *Dictionary of syr Thomas Eliot Knyght* (first edition 1538,

in the 'Additions' section) has "Atheos, he that doth not believe that god is." The *Thomae Thomasii Dictionarium* (3rd edition, 1592) published at Cambridge has "Athĕos, A miscreant, an Infidell, one which believeth no God: godless." During the mid-1600s, the definition of the *Calepinus Dictionarium* is shortened to *Impius qui negat Deum esse*. By 1681 the longer definition returned: *Impius, qui negat Deum esse, qui est sine Deo*. The 1708 *Dictionarium* had more nuance: *sine Deo, impius, qui nullum credit esse Deum* (without God, impious, who does not believe God exists). The dictionary was later published with the title, *Calepinus Septem linguarum*; its 1726 edition refined the definition for *Atheos* and added a second entry for *Atheus, & Atheos*, supplemented with citations for these terms.

> Atheos, *ateo*, qui nullos esse Deos credit. Cic. I. *de nat. deor*. c.23, & *Arnob*. lib. 3 & 5.
>
> Atheus, & Atheos, qui sine Deo, & religione est, *Ateista*; quailis fuit Diagoras Melius, qui Atheus cognominatus est, Cic. lib. I. *de nat. deor*. c.23. Diagoras, atheos qui dictus est. *Arnob* l. 5. p. 173. Quemquam ex his atheum, irreligiosum, sacrilegum.

These entries cite Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, Book 1, where Diagoras and Theodorus are labeled as atheists who deny god, and they cite Arnobius's *Against the Pagans* which says that the atheist denies or doubts that there are any gods.

The *Lexicon philosophicum graecum* (1615) by Rudolphus Goclenius the Elder (Rudolf Gōckel) offered explanations in Latin terms for hundreds of important concepts from Greek philosophy, natural history, and science. It included an entry for *atheos*, which says that an *atheos* is someone openly renouncing God, or someone who privately rejects God or divine providence. This entry then says that *atheos* also applies to those who, like Epicureans, fear neither God nor divine judgment. Finally, this entry points out that although Socrates was *atheos* by denying gods, affirming only one God cannot be *atheos*.[26]

In the wake of translations into Latin came more translations into European languages. Vernacular words in Italian, French, Spanish, German, and English for *atheos* (or *atheus*) and *atheismus* (or *atheismis*) came into use during the 1500s, and those terms consistently referred to not believing in god. There is no question that the accurate meaning of atheism was displayed on the pages of important and accessible books in front of Renaissance intellectuals across Europe. Whether any atheists covertly counted among those intellectuals is another question entirely. Knowing what atheism is cannot be equated with sympathetically understanding atheism. The opprobrium attached to *atheos* made it psychologically daunting as well as socially dangerous. Nevertheless, the word itself was not left unintelligible, even if Renaissance thinkers were typically mystified by the idea of a reasonably intelligent atheist.

During the late 1500s and 1600s, in an atmosphere increasingly charged with political upheavals, theological disputations, and heresy condemnations, lexicons were set aside when a polemicist sought to slander a rival as an "atheist" and a public enemy. Polemics twist meanings, but a term's extensional application need not dictate its intensional meaning, so it cannot be concluded that no one then knew what atheism basically meant. It is anachronistic to treat the freewheeling accusations of atheism heard during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as proof that no one could say what atheism involved, and claim nothing like atheism existed before (say) Baron d'Holbach in the mid-1700s. The balanced view is stated by Nicholas Davidson, writing about the turbulent Reformation climate: "[T]he appearance of the word 'atheist' . . . indicates a contemporary awareness of at least the possibility of serious unbelief. It would have hardly been effective as an insult unless it conveyed some sort of agreed meaning."[27]

Davidson illustrates his point by quoting from a letter to John Calvin in 1549, who relished launching accusations of heresy and atheism. The letter was from the Italian anti-trinitarian, Lelio Sozzini (Laelius Socinus, 1525–62), who told Calvin that he has heard it said that "Many of my friends are so well educated that they can scarcely believe God exists."[28] There is no way to know whether Sozzini's Italian colleagues openly espoused atheism (although northern Italy already had a reputation as a region replete with atheists), but this casual remark between two Christians shows that they at least shared one accurate idea of atheism. In his tract *De scandalis* (Concerning Scandals, 1550) Calvin groups together "Epicureans" and some humanist scholars as "atheists" whose writings suggest that "all religions have their origins in men's brains, that God exists because it pleases men to believe so, that hope of eternal life has been invented to deceive the simple, and that the fear of judgment is childish terror."[29] This is a fair list of ways to uphold atheism. Calvin's theology asserts that each person is intuitively aware of God, in order to forestall atheology's argumentative basis in natural reason, further illustrating how sixteenth-century theology was informed about aspects of philosophical atheism.

It is accurate to observe that the most frequent charge of atheism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries occurred in tracts written for polemical and propaganda purposes against dissenters from one's own denomination. The oldest meaning of *atheos* is thereby invoked: impiety against the god(s). Worshipping a non-existent god (and scorning god's true church) is obviously impious. Failing to worship god fits an age-old meaning to *atheos*. Also, denying the true god would seem equivalent to denying all gods, on the monotheistic premise that only one god is real. The fact that a polemical monotheist calls a rival dissenting monotheist an atheist, and that dissenter returns the invective, shows that the second-oldest meaning of *atheos* as "not accepting god" is foremost in both their minds. Furthermore, when an able polemicist brought up atheism in a treatise explaining why a supreme being governs the world, a prefatory remark about refuting

atheism's contrary denial is usually prominent. Even polemicists understood how to warn their readers against genuine atheism.

The Atheist in the Modern World

From the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, informative books about atheism most accessible to Christians were theological refutations of atheism. Priests reading the Church Fathers, Averroes, or Aquinas in Latin could encounter the idea of atheism before the printing press was invented, but expositions about atheism eventually reached bookstores in French, Italian, German, Spanish, and English. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, numerous tracts and treatises, often displaying "contre l'athéisme" or "against the atheist" in their titles, recounted atheist views in order to respond on behalf of god. This genre may be inappropriate for a wide readership, the clerical class worried, because so many readers were examining the atheist's side too closely. Authoring such books had its risks, too. Prosaic theologians exhibiting their orthodoxy knocked down straw man versions of atheism, teaching little about theology and less about irreligion. Ambitious theologians exhibiting their argumentative prowess against a well-reasoned atheism were often accused of explaining atheism too clearly or fairly.

There was nothing preventing an intellectual with even modest reading habits from understanding what an atheist is, or from discriminating atheism from heresy against the true god, even if it was expedient to conflate them. The widespread literary device about the "impossible atheist," so prevalent from the late 1500s to the late 1700s, illustrates how that difference was appreciated. Authors strenuously denying that a rational atheist could possibly exist was not just another way of saying that reason supports the author's view of god. If no actual atheist is rational, why bother offering reasonings to unbelievers, or anyone else? The straightforward explanation is that an admission that a rational person could deny god amounts to an admission that it could be reasonable to deny god, which sounds like an indirect concession to atheism. In a political and theological environment clinging to the conviction that humanity's universal assent guarantees theism's reasonableness, no exceptions could be allowed (except for the foolish or uncivilized). Therefore, to avoid the accusation of approving atheism, a theist must strenuously deny any possibility that a reasonable atheist could ever exist. (Just as a nonbeliever who thinks that a reasonable person could affirm god is not someone endorsing atheism). So long as no sane intellectual found supernaturalism to be less than reasonable, this reassuring tactic seemed to be the safest course.

And then Hobbes arrived. One of the most controversial intellectuals of the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes knew first-hand what charges of 'atheism' were all about. Before his 1651 book *Leviathan* reduced god to a physical power within the cosmos, Hobbes published *Elementa Philosophica de Cive* in 1642, where the Latin terms *atheos* and *atheismus* for

'atheist' and 'atheism' are used correctly. Categorizing Christians in God's kingdom excludes objects and animals, of course, and two kinds of people are also excluded: "neque etiam atheos, quia Deum esse non credunt; neque eos qui Deum esse credentes, eum tamen inferior haec regere non credunt." In translation, "Nor do we count Atheists, because they do not believe that God exists, nor those who believe in God's existence but not in his governance here below."[30] No critic of Hobbes voiced a complaint that he misused the terms *atheos* and *atheismus*. Quite the opposite: critics agreed with his definitions to accuse Hobbes of atheism in *Leviathan*, because something entirely physical and insentient is not a god. Atheology cannot disagree with that inference, even if Hobbes tried to exempt himself from atheism by affirming the existence of a supreme being.

Hobbes's philosophical opponents contradicted him with conclusions defending the immaterial soul and the spiritual sovereignty of god. Two of the earliest books by English thinkers with "Atheism" in their titles were published soon after *Leviathan*: Walter Charleton's *Darknes of Atheism dispelled by the Light of Nature, a Physico-Theologicall Treatise* (1652), and Henry More's *An Antidote to Atheism* (1653). Charleton, an empirical-minded physician who sympathized with Gassendi's scientific atomism, rebelled at the reduction of nature's laws and the human mind to material causes, and he required divine creation for matter. More applied his Platonic rationalism to his Cartesian assumption that matter must be inert, inferring an immaterial basis to nature's organization and the body's life. Both Charleton and More could agree on the starting-point for their disputations: the reasons for the existence of god must be explained to those who will not respect the universal intuition of god and do not think that any god created or controls the world.

Hobbes's political enemies tried to silence him during 1666–68, but Parliament wavered over language in a new bill making blasphemy and atheism criminal offenses. The draft bill of 1666/67 would have criminalized the denial of God and the denial of Christian doctrines about God, but it was tabled, probably because unorthodoxy and religious freethought was already too prevalent in England. The draft bill of 1667/68 was simplified, targeting those who "by word or by writing deny that there is a God."[31] Even politicians knew how to accurately identify atheism when it mattered most.

As for the ministerial class, they understood how a lexicographical definition for 'atheist' is one thing, while a consensus about who most deserves that label is another. From the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, protectors of orthodoxy (whatever they found orthodox) frequently hurled 'atheist' and 'heretic' at anyone deviating from rigid social expectations or challenging dominant ecclesiastical authorities, as well as anyone questioning dogmas of Christianity. Unorthodox religious minds were just as quick to return that charge of atheism in equal measure. Who was called an atheist depended greatly on local politics, social upheavals, cultural shifts, the fervor of theological disputation, and the intellectual climate of the times.[32]

All the while, dictionaries and encyclopedias offered brief and fairly clear definitions of the atheist. *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie Françoise* (1694) defined the atheist as someone who "does not recognize any god." Chambers's *Cyclopedia* (1728) said that the atheist is "a person who denies the deity." The first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1771) offered this definition: "a person who does not believe the existence of a deity." *The British Encyclopedia* (1818) said that an atheist is "one who does not believe in the existence of a God." The *New English Dictionary* (1888), later retitled as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, defined "atheist" as "One who denies or disbelieves the existence of a God." The second edition (1989) of the *Oxford English Dictionary* retains that definition without alteration.

Atheists and Atheism

As for atheism, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (11th edition, 1910) defines atheism as "a belief system which denies the existence of God." The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (1910) says that atheism is "an expression of dissent from positive theistic beliefs." The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) echoes its definition of 'atheist', stating that atheism means "Disbelief in, or denial of, the existence of a God." The *Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy* (2010) says that "atheism is disbelief in the existence of god, or, more strongly, affirming God's non-existence."[33]

The relationship between the meanings of 'atheist' and 'atheism' must be understood with due precision. The way that most definitions have offered a disjunction, providing two distinct ways to be an atheist or fit atheism, has both a historical basis, surveyed in the previous section, and a contemporary rationale. Atheism sounds like a personal opinion that may be held with lesser or greater confidence, but it implies more than that, since the 'dis' prefix to 'dissent' and 'disbelief' connotes a disagreement with others. Although unbelief is disagreeable enough to a firm believer, "disbelief" sounds more contradictory: my thought that "I don't believe in God," conveyed to a typical believer, is heard as "He thinks my belief in God is wrong." Atheists who want to avoid sounding so confident or disagreeable would not endorse atheism under such circumstances. Lexicography can handle that situation, treating 'atheist' like 'pacifist' or 'vegetarian' by distinguishing the '-ist' from the '-ism'. Some pacifists demand nonviolence from everyone, while other pacifists only seek their own exemption from military service. As for vegetarians, it is not necessary to work for a meatless world while enjoying one's own meatless diet. An atheist who does not make it their business to tell believers how they are wrong is still an atheist. An atheist may not agree with atheism, the judgment that it is unreasonable for anyone to think that any god is real.

It is no paradox to find that atheists do not have to endorse atheism. Being an atheist was never about acquiring and promoting a belief system, or an "unbelief system." Nor does the status of 'atheist' depend on making

dogmatic assertions. The godless are not counted accurately by asking people if they agree that "There's no god" or "Atheism is right," or by assuming that only people avoiding religious practices could be atheists. The mistaken view that any atheist must approve atheism, and show antipathy towards religion, has left many atheists uncounted and much unbelief unexplored. Rhetorical meanings for 'atheist' and 'atheism' in historical and popular usage have proliferated for polemical effect, to either favor believers or unbelievers. Disparaging or confusing connotations attached to terms, whether assigned by believers or nonbelievers, obscure credible views and obstruct reasonable discourse. Atheology has lexicography on its side, since no dictionary defines atheism as "god's nonexistence can be demonstrated" or "claiming to know that no god is real," and atheology does not stake unbelief's reasonableness on apodictic disproofs. Skepticism and agnosticism were central to atheology from its origins, as a later chapter recounts.

Atheism cannot be defined simply as impiety towards the god(s). A person could be dubious or impious about a god while secretly fearing that god. Fearing a god implies thinking that this god could be real, but someone affirming atheism could not fear any god. Nor is atheism just the view that god-belief is unreasonable. A person could agree that god-belief meets no standard of reason while placing pious trust in a god. Intellectually doubting a god is not enough for atheism, since religions can welcome agnostics willing to worship and pray. To rule out both cognitive assent and affective inclination, a term more inclusive than 'reasoning' and 'preferring' (and so on) would be useful. In the English language, the word 'thinking' can play that role: If I do not think that something is real, my feelings are unaffected too. In short, then, an atheist does not think that any god is real. An atheist is godless in a double-sense: no god out there, and no god within. No genuine atheist places unreasonable faith in a deity, and there is no such thing as reasonable faith for an atheist, either.

The position of atheism is more complex than the psychological condition necessary for being an atheist. Denying god and trusting faith, taken separately, are insufficient to define atheism. Mere denial must be insufficient because blank rejection could be unreasonable, and atheism would not uphold unreasonableness. Trusting faith is incompatible with atheism, since atheism regards anything leading someone towards religious faith as unreasonable, and atheists do without religious faiths as well as heavenly gods. Rejecting god without good reason is the essence of atheism to the faithful, but adopting faith when reason yields doubt is religious enough for the faithful. Atheism therefore requires two linked components: atheism holds that convictions affirming gods are less than reasonable, so people should live a godless life. The diametrically opposed position holds that affirming the right god(s) is entirely reasonable so people should keep god(s) in their lives. Two more views stand in distinctive contrast with these positions. The third view is that reason denies the gods but faith remains sensible. A person with this view could be labeled as a 'fideist' who is aligned with theism.

The fourth view is that reason cannot affirm or deny the gods but faith is not sensible. A person with this view can be labeled as an 'agnostic' who is aligned with atheism.

Atheology can proceed with clarity about the atheism it defends by distinguishing these four main views. Far greater diversity of opinion beyond those four views can be discriminated in populations by the field of secular studies and its ample frameworks for accommodating the broad range of unbelief. By contrast, secularist agendas urging public atheism expect authentic atheists to denounce religion, in order to grow their number of antagonistic secularists. Religion's champions also fixate on secularists against religion, happily pointing to polls shrinking the number of atheists by counting only affirmers of atheism. Atheology cannot agree with tight bounds around atheism, and denies that the only atheists are people able to say, "Yes, atheism is right."[34] Furthermore, studies of atheists and their psychological traits and social attitudes lead to distorted findings by ignoring broad ranges of nonbelievers.[35]

Notes

1 On secularism, consult Zuckerman and Shook, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism* (2017). On political secularism, see Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular: A Call to Arms for Religious Freedom* (2012), and Blackford, *Freedom of Religion and the Secular State* (2012). The right to religious belief and dissent is discussed in Marshall and Shea, ed., *Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes Are Choking Freedom Worldwide* (2011), and Bielefeldt, Ghanea, and Wiener, *Freedom of Religion or Belief: An International Law Commentary* (2016).

2 Current research in secular studies is exemplified by Zuckerman et al., *The Nonreligious: Understanding Secular People and Societies* (2016); and Zuckerman and Shook, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Secularism* (2017). See also Zuckerman, ed., *Atheism and Secularity* (2010); Zuckerman, *Society Without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us About Contentment* (2010); Williamson and Yancey, *There Is No God: Atheists in America* (2013); Lee, *Recognizing the Non-Religious: Reimagining the Secular* (2015); Beamon and Tomlins, ed., *Atheist Identities: Spaces and Social Contexts* (2015); Cipriani and Garelli, ed., *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion: Sociology of Atheism* (2016); and Quack and Schuh, ed., *Religious Indifference: New Perspectives From Studies on Secularization and Nonreligion* (2017). Examples of earlier research into unbelief, irreligion, and secularity include Campbell, *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion* (1977); Hale, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away* (1980); Davenport, *Virtuous Pagans: Unreligious People in America* (1991); Hunsberger and Altemeyer, *Amazing Conversions: Why Some Turn to Faith and Others Abandon Religion* (1997); Fuller, *Spiritual, But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (2001); Gärtner et al., ed., *Atheismus und religiöse Indifferenz* (2003); Hunsberger and Altemeyer, *Atheists: A Groundbreaking Study of America's Nonbelievers* (2006); and Hood et al., *Deconversion: Qualitative and Quantitative Results From Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and the United States of America* (2009). A reference work in the history of secular studies and atheology is Flynn, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (2007). This volume includes Frank Pasquale's article "Unbelief and Irreligion, Empirical Study and Neglect of."

3 It must be said that no convergence to predictions has appeared among researchers. Fundamentalist religions will soon overwhelm all other religious and nonreligious populations according to Kaufmann, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (2010). No, the full spectrum of religions around the world will enjoy continued growth, squeezing nonbelievers into a tiny fraction of the world's population, according to *Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970–2020: Society, Religion, and Mission* published by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (2013). No, the number of agnostics and atheists will be close to 10 percent of the world's population by 2050, according to Johnson and Grim, *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography* (2013). No, the nonreligious will be a global majority by 2040, according to Barber, *Why Atheism Will Replace Religion* (2012).

4 See for example Borne, *Atheism* (1961); Marty, *Varieties of Unbelief* (1964); Demerath, "Program and Prolegomena for a Sociology of Irreligion" (1969); Caporale and Grumelli, ed., *The Culture of Unbelief* (1971); Reid, *Man Without God: An Introduction to Unbelief* (1971); Jossua and Geffre, ed., *Indifference to Religion* (1983); Gallagher, *What Are They Saying About Unbelief?* (1995); and Habgood, *Varieties of Unbelief* (2000).

5 Prominent works about the history and processes of secularization include Martin, *The Religious and the Secular: Studies in Secularization* (1969); Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (1976); Bruce, *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* (2002); Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (2008); and Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (2012). On secularity and secularization, recent surveys may be consulted: Coles, *The Secular Mind* (1999); Fenn, *Beyond Idols: The Shape of a Secular Society* (2001); Dobbelaere, *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels* (2002); Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (2005); Warner, *Secularization and Its Discontents* (2010); Bruce, *Secularization* (2011); Sharpe and Nickelson, ed., *Secularisations and Their Debates* (2013); Latré et al., ed., *Radical Secularization? An Inquiry Into the Religious Roots of Secular Culture* (2014); and Hempton and McLeod, ed., *Secularization and Religious Innovation in the North Atlantic World* (2017).

6 The notable works in that genre include Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (2004); Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (2006); Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (2006); and Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007). Hitchens also edited *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever* (2007). Dawkins wrote and narrated a television documentary about religion titled *The Root of All Evil?* which aired in the UK in 2006, and rebroadcast as *The God Delusion* in 2010. Labeling them as the "New Atheists" spread after Gary Wolf applied the name to Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and Richard Dawkins in his *Wired* article "The Church of the Non-Believers" (2006).

7 Diverse atheist and secular academics are collected in Bullivant and Ruse, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (2014). The literary genre for atheism has inflated with the voices of many people speaking about secularity in their own lives, such as those collected in Blackford, ed., *50 Voices of Disbelief* (2009), and Levine, ed., *The Joy of Secularism: 11 Essays for How We Live Now* (2011). There's more than just academic prose to read, such as Goldstein, *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction* (2011). Secular authors and activists are describing their journeys, as a sampling displays: Lalli, *Nothing: Something to Believe In* (2007); Barker, *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher*

Became One of America's Leading Atheists (2008); Loftus, *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity* (2008); Mehta, *I Sold My Soul on eBay: Viewing Faith Through an Atheist's Eyes* (2009); Uhl, *Out of God's Closet: This Priest Psychologist Chooses Friendly Atheism* (2009); Brogaard, *The Homemade Atheist: A Former Evangelical Woman's Freethought Journey to Happiness* (2010); Stedman, *Faitheist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground With the Religious* (2012); DeWitt, *Hope After Faith: An Ex-Pastor's Journey From Belief to Atheism* (2013); Christina, *The Way of the Heathen: Practicing Atheism in Everyday Life* (2016); Rizvi, *The Atheist Muslim: A Journey From Religion to Reason* (2016); Garst, *Women Beyond Belief: Discovering Life Without Religion* (2016); and Evans, *Emancipation of a Black Atheist* (2017).

8 Prominent atheological works in this genre include Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (2001); Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (2006); and Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict* (2013). The short-cut atheological argument that adults still needing religion can be psychologically explained, so god-belief is unreasonable for anyone, is supplied by Power, *Adieu to God: Why Psychology Leads to Atheism* (2012). The reader should consult additional works in science of religion, such as Voland and Schiefenhövel, ed., *The Biological Evolution of Religious Mind and Behaviour* (2009); Rossano, *Supernatural Selection: How Religion Evolved* (2010); Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (2011); Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* (2012); Geertz, *Origins of Religion, Cognition and Culture* (2013); and Watts and Turner, ed., *Evolution, Religion, and Cognitive Science* (2014). For article-length overviews of this interdisciplinary research program, see Kirkpatrick, "Religion Is Not an Adaptation" (2006); Geertz, "Brain, Body and Culture: A Biocultural Theory of Religion" (2010); Atran and Henrich, "The Evolution of Religion" (2010); Bloom, "Religion, Morality, Evolution" (2012); and Pyysiäinen, "Cognitive Science of Religion: State-of-the-Art" (2013). See also Slone and Van Slyke, ed., *The Attraction of Religion: A New Evolutionary Psychology of Religion* (2016), and Bulkeley, *Big Dreams: The Science of Dreaming and the Origins of Religion* (2016).

9 Larue, *Freethought Across the Centuries* (1996); Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (2015).

10 King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (1999), pp. 201–202; Martin, "Atheism and Religion" (2007); Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam* (1999); Heck, *Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion* (2014); Quack, *Disenchanting India: Organized Rationalism and Criticism of Religion in India* (2011).

11 Aeschylus, *Persians* (1926), lines 805–812, pp. 178–181.

12 Aeschylus, *Persians* (1926), lines 495–499, p. 150.

13 The first translation is Aeschylus, *Persians and Other Plays* (2009), pp. 56–57. The second is Aeschylus, *The Complete Greek Tragedies* (1959), p. 237.

14 Plato, *Platonis opera quae extant omnia* (1578), p. 26e, note: "Constituta prius, ex fui etiam aduersa tii assensu, actione (ut bona fide agree videatur) docet in ipsa accusatione inesse ἄοὺςατον: statuere nimirum nullos esse deos: &, alios statute civitas. Quae prosecto non possunt unà esse vera. Illud porro notandum est, Socratem non simpliciter negare, se non arbitrary solem & lunam (quorum duorum nomine cæteri ethnicorum dii intelligűtur) esse deos: sed potius rem eludere, illius opionis confession in Anaxagoram deriuando. Certé, Socratem in ea fuisse sententia, ut ethnicorum deos, ueros deos minimè esse arbitraretur, ex multis locis apparet, qui, prout se ferent, á nobis notabuntur."

15 Consult Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (1990).

16 Rummel, *Erasmus as a Translator of the Classics* (1985).

17 Quotation from Arnobius, *Arnobii Afri Adversus gentes libri VII* (1651), p. 178. Translation from Arnobius, *The Seven Books of Arnobius Adversus Gentes* (1871), p. 255.
18 Aelian, *Claudius Aelianus, His Various History* (1665), Book 2, ch. 31, with the insertion of ἀθεότητα from the original Latin.
19 Harding, *A Confutation of a Booke Intituled An Apologie of the Church of England* (1565), p. 8.
20 Copenhaver, "Translation, Terminology, and Style in Philosophical Discourse" (1988), pp. 77–112. See also Aulotte, *Amyot et Plutarque* (1965).
21 Plutarch, *De superstition* (1928), 165c.
22 Plutarch, "Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions," in *Plutarch's Moralia XIII: Part 2* (1976), at 1075a.
23 Mantuanus, *Secundus Operũ B. Mantuani Tomus* (1513), p. 162.
24 Plutarch, *The Philosophy, Commonly Called, the Morals, Written by the Learned Philosopher, Plutarch of Chæronea* (1657), p. 214.
25 Robichaud, "Renaissance and Reformation" (2013), pp. 179–194.
26 Goclenius, *Lexicon Philosophicum Graecum* (1615), vol. 2, p. 3: "Αθεος dicitur qui vel apertè Deo renunciat, aut hunc ignorat prorsus, ita, ut hanc ignorantia disertis verbis prae se serat: quales olim Ethnici: vel occultè Deum aut providentiam eius abnegat: Vel saltem ita impiè ac dissolutè vivit, ut nullo planè timore Dei nullo judicii divini metu praeditum se esse clarè demonstret, ut Epicurei. Socrates erat ἄθεος, id est Deos destruebat, Deos esse negabat. Non erat ἄθεος, quia unum tantùm Deum statuebat. Hinc intelligitur, quid fit Atheismus."
27 Davidson, "Atheism in Italy, 1500–1700" (1992), p. 57.
28 As quoted in Davidson, "Atheism in Italy, 1500–1700" (1992), p. 55. See also Lazzaro, "Four Letters From the Socinus-Calvin Correspondence 1549" (1965), pp. 215–230.
29 Calvin, *Concerning Scandals* (1978), p. 61. See Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety* (1995).
30 Hobbes, *Elementa Philosophica de Cive* (1642), pp. 395–396; Hobbes, *On the Citizen* (1998), p. 172.
31 Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain From Hobbes to Russell* (1988), pp. 48–49.
32 Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (1988), chap. 1; Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729: The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (1990), chaps. 1–2. See Nigel Smith's helpful clarifications in "The Charge of Atheism and the Language of Radical Speculation, 1640–1660" (1992), pp. 131–158. On heresy hunting in Europe, the reader may start by consulting Laursen et al., ed., *Heresy in Transition: Transforming Ideas of Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2005), and Laursen, *Histories of Heresy in the 17th and 18th Centuries: For, Against, and Beyond Persecution and Toleration* (2002).
33 "Atheism," in Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 2 (1910), p. 173. "Atheism," in Proudfoot and Lacey, ed., *Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy* (2010), p. 26. See also Edwards, "Atheism" (1967), p. 175, and Stein, "The Meaning of Atheism and Agnosticism" (1980), p. 3.
34 See Guenther, "Bounded by Disbelief: How Atheists in the United States Differentiate Themselves From Religious Believers" (2014); Cragun "Who Are the 'New Atheists?'" (2015); Keysar, "The International Demography of Atheists" (2015); and Vainio and Visala, "Varieties of Unbelief: A Taxonomy of Atheistic Positions" (2015).
35 A prominent example is flawed research trying to detect implicit belief in god among atheists. See Shook, "Atheists are Rejecting Today's Culturally Evolved Religions, Not a 'First' Natural Religion" (2012), and Hitzeman and Wastell, "Are Atheists Implicit Theists?" (2017).

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3 Atheology and Theology

More people than atheists engage in atheology. Both religious and nonreligious thinkers have questioned religious doctrines and tested theological positions. Theologies arise within religious traditions to reinforce doctrinal instruction and respond to rival religions or internal schisms, but theologies can also explore religious psychology, adjudicate scriptural interpretations, engage with nonreligious intellectual systems (such as science), and deal with many other matters. Theologians resort to atheology to explain why a religion's rival god cannot be real, or to identify where a renegade theologian has lapsed into error about god. Many theologians have responded to atheological critiques by revising theological views of god. Expertise in atheology was never limited to the unbelieving side.

On the one hand, philosophical atheology can be more intellectually flexible than speculative theology, since it lacks preconceptions about the sort of supreme reality deserving confirmation. However, radical theologies no longer treating god as having its own reality—including some existentialist theologies and a-theologies—can converge with atheology's thorough skepticism about gods. On the other hand, atheology has a narrower purpose than religious criticism, which is any expression of disapproval towards religious emotions, religious practices, religious morals, religious social norms, or whatever else a religion may mean at an individual or social level.

Religion in general is not atheology's target, since religiosity is not reducible to beliefs about deities or supreme realities. Atheology specifically argues that atheism is a reasonable stance against god-belief, so it only concerns religion's propensity to encourage belief ('belief' here includes credulity, conviction, faith, assurance, fidelity, hope, trust, etc.) in gods, along with associated notions about pondering divine plans, appeasing unnatural agents, expecting miracles, worrying about an afterlife, saving one's soul, anticipating reincarnation, and so forth.

Centering Atheology on Theism

Atheism opposes theism in its broadest sense, inclusive of polytheisms, deisms, and panentheisms, and any assignment of godly reality or

responsibility above the level of naturalistic pantheism. (Equating the physical cosmos with god is philosophically interesting, especially to religious naturalists, but not atheologically alarming.) Some theological religions, such as Vedic Hinduism, some schools of Buddhism, and stages of Chinese Taoism, took ultimate reality to be impersonal rather than personal. (A few phases of these religions qualify as atheism instead, but that is beyond the scope of this book.) Some metaphysical philosophies postulate a supreme reality behind creation, or an imminent reality underlying appearances, to credit it with some godly character. Aristotle proposed a prime mover, Spinoza defined one substance with infinite attributes, Hegel tracked absolute Spirit's activity, Whitehead theorized a primordial potentiality, and Tillich spoke of the unconditioned ground to all being.

As for atheism, atheists can think about some sort of ultimate reality if reasoned inquiry approves, and they are at liberty to speak of 'god' to express their wonder or reverence towards the cosmos. For example, Hobbes reasoned his way to a material first cause, while Einstein was awed by nature's laws. Philosophy weighs cosmic worldviews, incorporating whatever reasonable investigations (such as those of science) can discover. If a dualistic worldview about mind and matter, or even an idealistic worldview about only mind, were to reasonably prevail, then atheism would not protest, so long as those worldviews omit gods and similarly divine agents. It may be convenient for atheism if naturalism eventually proved to be philosophically superior, but atheism neither presumes naturalism nor reduces to naturalism.

Atheism is not intimidated by the depths to reality. Acknowledging an ultimate reality justified by reason is not the same as acknowledging a god or becoming religious. Nonreligious people do not care to enjoy any beneficial or "correct" way to have a relationship with a supreme reality, beyond understanding how the cosmos works and living within those parameters. Metaphysical systems, wisdom traditions, and ethical theories are occasionally labeled as 'religious' in a broad sense, as having to do with matters of supreme interest and primary importance.[1] Philosophy shares in the academic ability to discriminate among these major types of belief systems, despite the way that overlaps and gray areas are inevitable. Philosophy broadly deals with comprehending and evaluating all manner of belief systems, while atheology more narrowly opposes religious worldviews that include ideas about godly matters. Having narrower agendas, neither atheism nor atheology can be a religion, a wisdom tradition, a philosophy, a metaphysics, a science, an ethics, or an ideology.

Atheism must not be reduced to a system or worldview, and atheology cannot be assimilated with naturalism. Assuming that naturalism is correct in order to doubt supernaturalism is just as fallacious as presuming supernaturalism before convicting atheism of inadequacy. Philosophy can confirm how that naturalism-supernaturalism contrast, relevant for certain intellectual contexts, is not a proven absolute division for all reality. (And theologians have blurred that contrast by pondering creator-creation

conjunctions.) Accordingly, neither atheism nor atheology must be premised on naturalism (or materialism, physicalism, etc.), or any ontological or metaphysical worldview. That methodological independence is a postulate of systematic atheology. Systematic atheology is not essentially about weighing the respective merits of theism and naturalism.[2]

The expositions of atheological arguments in the second half of this book do not require the presumption of any sort of naturalism, whether methodological, scientific, ontological, and so forth. One of the original atheological traditions, worldview atheology, does argue for nature's self-sufficiency and supernaturalism's irrelevance. Yet that natural atheology does not characterize or dictate all of atheology, even if its contemporary manifestation in scientific naturalism points towards atheism. What atheists (or theists) may happen to claim about naturalism does not dictate all of atheology. Atheology has a long memory, remembering how atheism has also been allied at times with rationalism, idealism, positivism, or phenomenology instead. There are strong atheological arguments from materialism—such as rejecting miracles and souls because energy cannot be created or destroyed—but systematic atheology as a whole is metaphysically agnostic, consistent with atheism's ample capacity for skepticism.

Atheology primarily focuses on standard theological systems and novel theological developments. Not only is there no god, there is no one conception of god, so atheology monitors theological ideas about gods. God is not what a deity used to be. Perhaps god is no being at all. Strains of liberal theology, existentialist theology, postmodern theology, feminist theology, and radical theology have been de-prioritizing god as a supernatural being, or denying that god has any reality at all.[3] The reason why atheism and atheology bother with arguing against the gods is because religious people unreasonably affirm them. Simultaneously, atheology can advise transformations to religion in non-theistic directions.

Perhaps 'god' should only be a symbol of sacredness, a gesture towards mystery, a label for nature's immensities, a character in religious narratives, an ideal of moral perfection, a proxy for ethical absolutes, an expression of hope, an immersion in love, a response to beauty, an encounter with awe, and so on. Worldviews omitting deities can retain religious features—examples include religious humanisms and religious naturalisms.[4] Philosophical stances can agree with religious views about the value of uplifting emotions, the benefits of ritual and meditation, the rightness of ethical principles, the high worth of human life, and the responsibility to protect our planet.[5] Godless theologians encouraging forms of religiosity scaled down to worldly dimensions are doing atheology's work under a different banner.

Focusing Atheology on Theology

Limited to human commonalities and intelligence's powers, and distanced from worldviews it must scrutinize and evaluate, systematic atheology relies

on neutral grounds. In order for systematic atheology to focus on reasoning directly with theology, its philosophical strategies must be distinguished from other kinds of atheological tactics used on behalf of atheism.

Atheology encounters all sorts of arguments defending the religious life. Just as atheology is not beholden to every criticism that atheists have thought of, theology offers far more than blunt accusations made against atheism. Nevertheless, atheology must have ready replies to all-to-common misrepresentations of atheism. Depicting atheism as the claim that god's reality is disproven, the certainty that no god exists, the revulsion towards everything religious, or the hope that science explains everything, are caricatures reducing atheism to slogans ready for ridicule by books for religious audiences. What gets obscured by such slogans are the sensible thoughts that reasonable doubt does not require proof or certainty; rejecting god is not about closing churches; and realizing that science may not explain everything does not mean that supernaturalism can. Atheism won't be the answer to everything, either, but the oft-heard complaint that unbelief is unmotivational and uninspiring is no objection to atheism. Atheology observes that disillusionment with religion after thinking for oneself and trusting one's moral compass lends confidence to the lifelong enjoyment of a realistic view of life and its beckoning possibilities. Secular philosophies such as humanism welcome people seeking more empowerment over their lives.[6]

Atheism is not a neutral conclusion, but intellectually defenses of atheism can proceed neutrally, starting from common grounds and engaging theology with reasonings rather than rhetoric. Theism is hardly neutral either, but theological positions can similarly avoid question-begging and polemical burden-shifting. Atheists and theists have claimed good morals, or sound thinking, (and so on), for their own side often enough, and the temptation to rest with entrenched biases is a perennial distraction away from intellectual conversations. Atheological efforts resist that temptation, preferring philosophical dialogue with theological positions less beholden to religious prejudices. Atheology's argumentative opposition is theology, not the world's religions. The religious life shrugs off intellectual complaints as tone-deaf and heartless. Theology, for its part, can denigrate secularity but the nonreligious stay unpersuaded by myths and mysteries. Atheism is not refuted by the fidelity of the faithful, and theism is not disproven by the disinterest of the secular. Theologians can speak for their own side, but atheology is not characterized by everything that atheists have said in favor of atheism or against religion.

Selected writings from more thoughtful atheists that do rise to the level of philosophical atheology are amply cited in this book's chapters. There is no argument for god or divine deeds that have not been philosophically challenged, but only a representative sample are presented in this book. While far from exhaustive, therefore, its chapters cover strategies sufficient to refute any argument for god if one or another atheological method is applied with due philosophical acumen. Arguments rejecting

specific religious convictions fall under general strategies for exposing the unreasonableness to those kinds of convictions, which in turn ultimately rely on philosophical methods for countering theological defenses of those convictions.

Atheology's appeal to neutral grounds suffice for doubting a god-like status for Jesus, for example. Trying to conceive a "Man-God" violates plain logicality; nothing scientific can confirm dogmas about Jesus's amazing deeds; anything truly moral about Jesus is not original with him; and Jesus's teachings, while politically potent, do not amount to laws for running a country. Robert Price's *The Case Against the Case for Christ* (2006) explains these problems and many more. Christians who reply that no criticisms affect their abiding faith are only confirming atheology's judgment that belief in Jesus as a deity is quite unreasonable. However, when theological defenders of that faith offer explanations why a miraculous being does not require illogical conceptions, why a deity would not be answerable to science's inquiries, why revelation delivers essential moral instruction to humanity, or why a prophet's teachings yield rightful laws and obedient citizens, then those defenses must be matched by philosophical atheology, and later chapters explain how.

To give another example, systematic atheology is not part of the burgeoning industry of explaining religiosity by entirely natural means. Perhaps beliefs in the soul and free will arise from cognitive illusions generated by evolved brains; perhaps notions of gods arose from crediting natural events with agency; perhaps prophets invented gods to endorse moral codes they urged on credulous peoples; perhaps religions become large and long-lasting when they prove to be socially useful. Pascal Boyer's *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (2001) explored those kinds of hypotheses, and more have been proposed since his path-breaking work. As religion's theological defenders offer reasons to justify those religious convictions, despite naturalistic accounts for them, philosophical atheology challenges those reasons as inadequate, and later chapters do so.

This volume of atheology cannot counter minor variants to arguments for and against gods, especially if a variation is recent or highly technical, although citations guide the reader to ample atheological responses. Those seeking an entryway into theist-atheist controversies would benefit from my book, *The God Debates* (2010). As for theologians, little in this book will look unfamiliar, although its numerous references to diverse theological perspectives may be useful. This systematic atheology was composed mainly for the edification of atheism's defenders, to elevate the intellectual character and philosophical sophistication of future god debates.

Enlarging Atheology after Onto-Theology

Western theology was developed and designed for the explanation of theism in the course of its development from (roughly) Plato to Aquinas, but

its purview expanded since the Renaissance, as creative conceptions about god's peculiar kind of reality have proliferated. Furthermore, people have always had alternative ways to feel religious about the world, besides those pre-approved by theological doctrine. Prominent illustrations include finding divinity or sacredness in universal laws or cosmic energies, in the awe-inspiring 'beingness' of reality, in the allegiance-inspiring value of ethical ideals, or in exceptionally elevated or aesthetic feelings.

Atheism is not directed against nature reverence, mystery fascination, or ecstatic emotion, despite the contempt shown by some atheists towards those human dispositions. A lifestance embracing doubt, awe, and humility before the unknown and sublime may not be common among those with materialist or naturalist worldviews, but an open-minded lifestance is not superstition or supernaturalism either. Varieties of agnosticism bypassing restrictive meanings to god and religion are welcome allies of atheology.[7] However, atheology cannot countenance the pseudo-agnosticisms of inspirational doubt, which encourages church-goers to maintain unquestioned convictions and traditions while theological vagueness wards off atheism to keep those simple faiths undisturbed.[8]

Speaking of simple faiths, only simplistic theologies preach that religion's merits are based on gratifying results in this life. Proselytizing to appeal to peoples' ardent wishes takes the risk of delivering a preferential, tribal, vengeful, or genocidal god who bestows worldly goods, favors one's nation, smites the wicked, and vanquishes the enemy. Plenty of people wish that a god is real, so long as that god always sides with them. No god's existence becomes reasonable in this fashion; besides, no religion really supposes that a god's reality depends on its reliable delivery of worldly satisfactions. Instead, religions urge god-belief all the more fervently as people must endure hard times and regret troubled or wasted lives. The appreciable benefits of religiosity for individuals can account for their convictions, but those benefits will not show that any god is real.

Similarly, natural explanations for religiosity cannot show that god is not real. Devout convictions surely produce impressive consequences in many religious lives, but this fact about people at most supports "belief in belief" or belief in the power of conviction.[9] Faith is real and has real effects in the world, but nothing about faith's power on earth can show that a god is real in heaven. If theology attempts to argue that human well-being due to religiosity demonstrates that a god is real, atheology offers its skeptical response, but atheism need not deny that religious sentiments have genuine psychological effects. Neither atheism nor atheology is directly opposed to religious feelings or spiritual inspirations, nor is atheology designed to argue with people over the pulses and peaks of their emotional or moral lives. All the same, anyone feeling more righteous because they expect the world's creator to be on their side, or anyone feeling more empowered to control others' lives because they think that cosmic providence requires conformity, meets opposition in atheism.

Atheism will never agree with theism, but the opposition between atheology and theology has always been dynamic, not static. Intellectuals trapped in categorical dichotomies, ontological metaphysics, or positivism would not notice, but the twinning of atheology and theology could play out its dialectical dance in a drift towards their alliance or coalescence. Suppose for the sake of argument that atheology is limited to only opposing whatever theology happened to uphold—atheology must wait upon theology to construct targets for its destructive criticisms. For every theological argument for god, an atheological counter-argument must be constructed, lest a good argument be left standing in support of god. Let positive theology try to perceive god's handiwork in the world's ways, and atheology must point out the possibility that only more nature extends beyond the observable. Let theology assign attributes to hidden god, and atheology must skeptically question how anyone could know such mysterious attributes. As theology mutates under skeptical pressure, atheology morphs to keep up. Where negative theology is resigned to assigning to god whatever may be left after denying all conceivable attributes to god, atheology is gratified that no one would be really thinking about a real god. Where theology takes refuge in a notion of god as composing ultimate reality, atheology must ontologically divorce god from being. Finally, if theology agrees that god has no existence and is not real, while still claiming that divinity is somehow detectible in human experience, atheology can also examine that experiential field.

In 1945 Jean-Paul Sartre approved of "atheist existentialism," to use his term, to shift attention away from humanity's determination to conceive god and raise concerns about god determining the concept of the human.

> Existentialism is not so much an atheism in the sense that it would exhaust itself attempting to demonstrate the nonexistence of God; rather, it affirms that even if God were to exist, it would make no difference—that is our point of view. It is not that we believe that God exists, but we think that the real problem is not one of his existence; what man needs is to rediscover himself and to comprehend that nothing can save him from himself, not even valid proof of the existence of God.[10]

Denying an objective or a subjective reality to god follows from deflating rationalism and metaphysics, and in this sense atheism is achieved by atheology. The question remains whether existentialism will be truly atheistic and hence fully humanistic, in order to properly identify the human values and responsibilities sufficient for the ethical life.

Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* (1951–57) agreed that confining divinity within a subject-object framework only calls out for atheism. He declared that existentialism cannot be either atheistic or religious, since concern for religiosity comes from religion traditions. Tillich then proposed a religious existentialism able to capaciously incorporate within human experience an appreciation for the ultimate ground of everything: an inconceivably

transcendent reality permitting one's life to be organized around some "ultimate concern," as he phrased it. John Dewey had already used the term 'the religious' (as distinct from creedal 'religions') to indicate one's supreme commitment to realizing worthy ideals in *A Common Faith* (1934), without postulating anything beyond nature to orient one's piety. Dewey's *Experience and Nature* (1925), like Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), awards philosophical priority to the environs of lived experience—this human "life-world" or the realm of "being-in-the-world." For these three atheological thinkers, philosophy itself abstains from assuming religious ideas or appealing to supernatural matters while questioning god. As Heidegger said, "Philosophy, in its radical self-positing questionability, must be in principle a-theistic. Precisely on account of its basic intention, philosophy must not presume to possess or determine God."[11]

Radical theologies have explored authentic religious lives unencumbered by worries over a god real enough to become the object of a contest between logocentric philosophy and onto-theology. Religious existentialism, whether as a romantic revolt against scholasticism or a pragmatic faith-in-action without theology, was nothing new, at least since the times of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Schleiermacher during the first half of the nineteenth century. The religious life is a mode of being-in-the-world too, and if the experience of holiness and sacredness can appear there, no phenomenology or existentialism could deny it. But what is wanted is an assurance that more than mere human 'beingness' enriches experience (otherwise subjectivism can prevail), so theology usually re-launches its quest to existentially divide being from god if the human and the divine must not be ontologically divided. At this stage, atheology greets its closest cousin, a-theology.

Coordinating Atheology with A-theology

The starkest metaphysical alternative to Being is Nothing, one might suppose, so a radically post-theistic theology can propose nothingness or unreality as essential to divinity. If a theologian is so inclined, the finite can be equated with being, so that the "in-finite" can indicate god. And to guarantee that no philosophizing could interfere, theology might religiously identify that which is not thought with what cannot be described in experience. But where in human experience is a pre-reflective encounter with sheer nothingness or pure transcendence to be found?

A new search commenced to seek an unusual sensibility to religiosity, somewhat distinct from mysticism, apophatic immanence, or entirely negative theology. Philosophical meditations on faith in the *Pensées* (1670) of Blaise Pascal, Friedrich Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799), the *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) of Søren Kierkegaard, the *Confession* (1882) of Leo Tolstoy, and the *Zürau Aphorisms* (1918–19) of Franz Kafka, are prominent literary expressions of this genre.[12]

Georges Bataille's *L'expérience intérieure* (Inner Experience, 1943), intended as a volume for a series of works collected as a *Somme athéologique* (Summa Atheologica), along with his final book, translated as *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge* (composed around 1952), calls attention to non-discursive encounters with a god that no philosophy nor theology could countenance. He defines his atheology as "the science of the death or destruction of God . . . inasmuch as it as a thing." In the wake of that destruction, thought can allegedly encounter something that is not more thought, in addition to not being a thing. Bataille relies on the achievement of atheism to next confront the "absence of god" in tormented ignorance, which is taken to be the permanent presence of this unknowable god. Simone Weil and Emmanuel Levinas also found religiosity in the absence of god.[13] Weil celebrated the receptivity of grace through an agnostic indifference about trying to know god's character or reality. Levinas finds this ultimate unknowable in the face of the stranger, the "Other," and this (unthought) intuition that here is a person worthy of our obligation must be an arriving clue to something utterly beyond being, yet it demands unconditional respect for moral law, and hence 'god' is its justifiable label. Atheism is metaphysically correct but ethically empty, according to Levinas, and any moral relativism or secular multiculturalism is equivalent to atheism and equally blind to transcendent values erupting in human experience.

In 1967, Jacques Derrida warned against "negative atheology" that pairs with negative theology as its "accomplice" for pointing to an inescapable "center."[14] Derrida refused to call himself an atheist, since he questioned philosophical presumptions behind denying reality to god. All the same, god is quite dead, along with all metaphysics, necessities, and absolute values. Derrida's suggestion of a complete atheology that goes through the heart of theology instead of bypassing theology exemplified opportunities for original questions, also pursued by French thinkers such as Paul Ricœur, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jean-Luc Marion, and Alain Badiou.[15] Should theology embrace atheology to secure an attachment to what cannot be clearly thought? If so, is anything like a god really encountered?

Embracing atheism and nihilism would not have been the obvious destiny of theology, at least in the West. Not even mysticism or negative theology encouraged the abandonment of all thought about god, leaving anything that anyone intuits about the immanently transcendent to enjoy default validity just because it won't be stained by ontology. (Suspicion attaches to any intuition deemed so inscrutable that it cannot be discriminated from nothingness, especially when it is further deemed to be genuinely divine precisely for its blank emptiness.) Most twentieth-century religious thinkers eager to apply phenomenology and existentialism stopped short of negative atheology, only proclaiming how the religious life has just as much legitimacy as any nonreligious life. There are religious traditions to be upheld, after all—why should theology debate the emptiness of "god" while churches are getting emptier?

By the 1960s, fundamentalists could see where philosophical debate was going, and it was not towards Christ. Tinged with anti-intellectual pietism, some Protestant thinkers jettisoned theology for scripture-based faith. Still, devout piety and knowing God are two different things. Somehow the distance between an individual mind and God's reality has to be collapsed together in order for "knowing faith" to make any sense. The nineteenth-century legacy from Hegel had already pondered that issue. Early twentieth-century idealism had an answer, embodied in the work of Harvard philosopher Josiah Royce (1855–1916), which claimed that the possibility of any knowledge by anyone must depend on the reality of a single supreme mind that knows everything.

Royce's idealism had many heirs. One strand was conveyed by Royce's student Harry Jellema, who became a professor at Calvin College in Michigan, where Cornelis Van Til (1895–1987) studied philosophy and theology. Van Til continued to study idealism at Princeton University and wrote his dissertation under Archibald Bowman, another sympathetic follower of idealism. The label of 'presuppositionalism' (an idealist term) began to attach to Van Til's work, since he had blended the scripturalism of Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) with transcendental arguments to argue that the reality of the God of the Bible must be taken for granted when anyone claims to know anything. This presuppositionalism turned the tables on philosophy and theology, since it could now play the role of the skeptic towards any non-Christian worldview, once its own Christian knowledge was completely insulated from all possibility of reasoned criticism. Christians can thereby claim to know their god-belief, defend that knowledge with circular inferences displaying tight coherence, and reject all criticism as dismissably alien to the Christian faith.[16] Not only does presuppositionalism allow the believer to deny anything about modernity that one detests (such as evolution, or equal rights), it devolves into another kind of a-theology, where god's reality dissolves into a mystery of faith.[17]

Insulating faith from reason continued to intrigue philosophy. Claiming that the concept of god lacks objective significance or any meaning occupied some twentieth century positivists such as A. J. Ayer (1910–89). However, positivism did not produce a satisfactory worldview or philosophy of science, and yielded only a skeptical atheology. Inspired by positivism, some atheologians sharply limited atheology's task to exposing logical fallacies in theological positions. Taking up positivism's invitation, some anthropological and religious thinkers agreed that religiosity is existential and noncognitive, permitting personal faith, religious "forms of life," and theological fideism to be placed beyond critique.[18]

Atheology is not limited to positivism or cognitivism, it does not conflate theology with cultural anthropology, and it is not prevented from scrutinizing existentialist forays into negative atheology. Theology's restriction to the affairs of human religiosity in its natural abode seems inevitable to atheism.

Atheology has no objections to depictions of spirituality's exhilarations and topographies of faith's journeys. When theology discovers that religiosity concerns human projections of the sacred or divine, atheology can agree that the essence of religion is rooted in the human imagination. When theologians ponder how so little can be comprehended about god, atheology could hardly object to anyone seeking god and finding nothing. Negative atheology and a-theology, as far as atheism is concerned, can stand in good company with atheology.[19]

Clarifying Atheology on Atheism

Atheology can appreciate how many religions do not emphasize 'belief' or 'faith' about any deities in their ritual practices. Atheology has very little to say about such religions. (By contrast, secularism can be sharply critical towards any religious matters and practices in the course of advancing social and political agendas.) There are also many cultural systems sharing similarities with religion—due to the inherent vagueness of the term 'religion'—but those systems lack most or all of the religious ideas opposed by atheism. A system of knowledge seeking an ultimate non-natural reality, but urging no human attitude or action regarding it, is just a speculative metaphysics. A system of customs that distinguishes inviolable priorities from daily matters for sustaining a social order without appealing to anything unnatural or sacred is just a wisdom tradition. A system of values urging a special way of life and a better society within the natural world is a social ethics and/or political theory. Atheism raises no objections to seeking reasonable worldviews, sustaining wise customs, and organizing social orders. Atheism does not need to complain about wisdom traditions encouraging people to orient their lives in accord with cosmic ways, or religious practices encouraging people to preserve robust relationships with each other and the environing world.

Worldviews holding that 'god' is essentially and entirely interfused with just the natural cosmos, or the natural cosmos is identical with 'god', or there are powerful 'gods' consisting of nothing but natural forces or guiding energies within nature, are not worldviews asserting supernaturalism, so atheism is not designed for rejecting them. Science and naturalism are better positioned to examine the cogency of thin pantheisms or spiritualisms. (Atheists are at liberty to abstain from such worldviews as too religious for themselves, of course.) A selective framework displaying atheology's demarcation line for atheism, mentioning many figures we shall meet in later chapters, is helpful. To follow this classification of philosophies, note that agnosticism, materialistic pantheism, and naturalism are within atheology's definition of atheism. Also, this is a classification of philosophies, not a thinker's personal sympathies; the atheism of a figure's philosophy is classified here, regardless of that thinker's personal interest in religiosity or congeniality towards popular religion.

Philosophies not satisfying Atheism

Relies on atheology, approves knowledge of one god: Xenophanes, Plato, G. Berkeley, P. Bayle, J. Locke, Voltaire, C.S. Lewis

Relies on atheology, denies all gods except one god beyond human conception: Pliny, Augustine, Aquinas, P. Gassendi, S. Kierkegaard, P. Tillich

Expertise in atheology, denies knowledge of god(s), but urges practical faith in god: M. Montaigne, B. Pascal, I. Kant, W. James, K. Barth

Expertise in atheology, denies unnatural gods, but discerns guiding god(s) with/within nature: Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, G. Bruno, A. Shaftesbury, G. Herder, G.W. Hegel, C.S. Peirce, A.N. Whitehead

Philosophies satisfying Atheism

Expertise in atheology, doubts unnatural gods, but allows uncaring 'god(s)' with/within nature: Epicurus, L. Vanini, T. Hobbes, Spinoza, F. Schelling, J. Dewey

Expertise in atheology, denies knowledge of god(s), leaves religion in doubt: Protagoras, Carneades, Sextus Empiricus, D. Hume, M. Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill, M. Heidegger, J. Derrida, M. Daly

Expertise in atheology, denies knowledge of god(s), embraces a naturalism: Anaximander, Democritus, Strato, Machiavelli, J. Toland, E. Haeckel, G. Santayana, W.V. Quine

Expertise in atheology, confirms atheism, but disdains 'atheist' label: D. Diderot, A. Schopenhauer, H. Martineau, H. Spencer, T.H. Huxley, H. Bergson, E. Cassirer, A. Flew

Endorses atheology and atheism, does not deny 'atheist' or 'agnostic' label: M. de Condorcet, K. Marx, F. Nietzsche, B. Russell, J. Habermas, R. Rorty

Endorses atheology, atheism, and atheist/humanist identity: d'Holbach, A. Comte, J.-P. Sartre, A. Rand, K. Nielsen, P. Kurtz

Atheology welcomes studies by theologians interested in quasi-theistic metaphysics and cosmology, and listens to the advice of intellectual

historians worried about errant lexicography. What a particular theological movement takes to be the best account of god cannot, however, dictate the meaning of theism, much less the meaning of atheism. Just because a philosopher might meet some innovative theological standard for contemplating god does not mean that this thinker's philosophy embraced theism. It is anachronistic to impose a deistic, panentheistic, immanentist, or postmodern idea about god (for example) upon pre-modern thinkers just to hold them innocent of atheism. That imposition is doubly misguided, since medieval and modern theologies had developed in adaptive response to earlier atheological critiques. As later chapters about atheology's long history are able to recount, theologians could never afford to be ignorant of atheism's intellectual grounds, and that remains true to this day.

Notes

1 Scholars of religion sometimes understand theology in this manner. See for example Willem Drees's succinct formulation, "A Theology = a Cosmology *and* an Axiology," in *Religion and Science in Context* (2010), p. 77. An exploration of comparative theologies about ultimate reality is offered by Neville, *Ultimate Realities: A Volume in the Comparative Religious Ideas Project* (2001).

2 For a defense of atheism predicated on naturalism's superior plausibility, see Oppy, *The Best Argument Against God* (2013).

3 On liberal theology, consult Adams et al., ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought* (2013); Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (2001–06); and Rasor, *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21st Century* (2005). See also Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings? The Decentering of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (2011); Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (2012). On feminist theology, consult Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (1973), and Isherwood and McEwan, ed., *An A–Z of Feminist Theology* (2016).

4 Schulz, *Making the Manifesto: The Birth of Religious Humanism* (2002); Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today: The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative* (2008).

5 A recent enthusiast for a "religious atheism" that amounts to secular devotion to ethical ideals (i.e., humanism) is Dworkin, *Religion Without God* (2013), chap. 1. See also Apostel et al., ed., *Religious Atheism?* (1982). The possibility of "spiritual" atheism is explored in Fuller, *Spiritual, But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (2001); Comte-Sponville, *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality* (2007); Antinoff, *Spiritual Atheism* (2009); Krasny, *Spiritual Envy: An Agnostic's Quest* (2010); Walach, *Secular Spirituality: The Next Step Towards Enlightenment*; and Harris, *Waking Up: Searching for Spirituality Without Religion* (2014).

6 Notable works on humanist ethics around the world include Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism* (1993); Davies, *Humanism* (1997); Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism* (1987); Epstein, *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* (2009); Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (2003); Ikeda, *New Horizons in Eastern Humanism: Buddhism, Confucianism and the Quest for Global Peace* (2010); and Kitcher, *The Ethical Project* (2011). Humanist philosopher A.C. Grayling cannot see anything worthy of the label 'humanism' in the universal ethics of any religion, instead depicting humanism and religion as contestants for control of civilization, in his books *What Is*

Good? The Search for the Best Way to Live (2003) and *The God Argument: The Case Against Religion and for Humanism* (2013). On the legacy of humanist politics in Europe, see Todorov, *Imperfect Garden: The Legacy of Humanism* (2009). A critical examination of humanism from a religious perspective is Geisler, *Is Man the Measure? An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism* (2005), while a representative condemnation of humanistic liberalism is John Gray, *The Silence of Animals: On Progress and Other Modern Myths* (2013).

7 Examples of this enriched agnosticism based on continental philosophy include Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (2010), and Cox, *The God Confusion: Why Nobody Knows the Answer to the Ultimate Question* (2013). Loyal Rue's science-informed agnosticism is not alienated from wisdom traditions, in *Religion Is Not About God* (2005). Former Anglican priest Mark Vernon explores a wise agnosticism for life in *How to Be an Agnostic* (2011). Berger and Zijderveld's *In Praise of Doubt: How to Have Convictions Without Becoming a Fanatic* (2009) urges a metaphysical agnosticism still hospitable to devout social convictions. Agnostic philosopher J. L. Schellenberg moves in the direction of religious naturalism with *Evolutionary Religion* (2013).

8 Fergusson's *Faith and Its Critics* (2009) affirms metaphysical doubt so thoroughly that there is no truth anywhere to worry about, in order to allow religious believers to keep their faith in belief. Similarly, Steinberger's *The Problem With God: Why Atheists, True Believers, and Even Agnostics Must All Be Wrong* (2013) accuses everyone (including himself) of knowing so little about what caused the world that there simply *must* be something beyond this world.

9 Jon Mills offers psychological explanations for faith's tenacity while casting doubt upon god's reality in *Inventing God: Psychology of Belief and the Rise of Secular Spirituality* (2016). The phrase "belief in belief" entered into intellectual discourse with Palgrave's essay "Hume and His Influence Upon History" (1844), p. 307, which was widely reprinted in English-language literary reviews and quarterlies. Recent scholars have used it, such as Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (1947), p. 66; MacIntyre, "The Fate of Theism" (1969), p. 21; and Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (2006), p. 6.

10 Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (2007), pp. 53–54.

11 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (1951), pp. 172–173, and then Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (1957), p. 25. Dewey, *A Common Faith* (1934), chap. 1. On Dewey, see Shook and Good, *John Dewey's Philosophy of Spirit, With the 1897 Lecture on Hegel* (2010). Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* (2001), p. 148. On Heidegger, see Kovacs, *The Question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology* (1990), chap. 19; and Dillard, *Heidegger and Philosophical Atheology* (2011).

12 Consult Hunter, *Pascal the Philosopher* (2013); Mariña, *Transformation of the Self in the Thought of Schleiermacher* (2008); Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (2009); Boot, *God and Man According to Tolstoy* (2009); and North, *The Yield: Kafka's Atheological Reformation* (2015).

13 This definition of atheology is in Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge* (2001), p. 166. See also Weil, *Waiting for God* (1951). A selection of Levinas's writings on religion is *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (1998). See also Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (2000).

14 Derrida, "Ellipsis" (1967), in *Writing and Difference* (1978), p. 297. See Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (1997) and a contrary view by Hagglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (2008). Van Sevenant discusses interpretations of Derrida's 'atheism' in "Of a Promising Atheism" (2011). Also consult Baring and Gordon, ed., *The Trace of God: Derrida and Religion* (2014).

15 See de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (1999); Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (2010); Watkin, *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux* (2011); Phelps, *Alain Badiou: Between Theology and Anti-Theology* (2013); and Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (2017). An overview is assembled by Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life* (2003). See also Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (2001), and Caputo, "Atheism, A/theology, and the Postmodern Condition" (2006), pp. 267–282. An American version of this "Death of God" movement was established by Altizer in *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (1966), and Altizer and Hamilton, ed., *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (1966). MacIntyre and Ricœur grapple with post-theology in *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (1969).

16 See Anderson, *Reason and Worldviews: Warfield, Kuyper, Van Til and Plantinga on the Clarity of General Revelation and Function of Apologetics* (2008), and an atheological response to presuppositionalism in Shook, *The God Debates* (2010), chap. 6. On Royce, see Clendenning, *The Life and Thought of Josiah Royce* (1999); Auxier, *Time, Will, and Purpose: Living Ideas From the Philosophy of Josiah Royce* (2013), and Deats and Robb, ed., *The Boston Personalist Tradition in Philosophy, Social Ethics, and Theology* (1986).

17 See Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology* (2006); Bishop, *Believing by Faith: An Essay in the Epistemology and Ethics of Religious Belief* (2007); and Moser, *The Severity of God: Religion and Philosophy Reconceived* (2013).

18 A.J. Ayer followed Russell's example of dismissing atheism along with theism, judging that "God does not exist" must be as meaningless as "God exists" due to the meaninglessness of 'god'. See Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936). Richard Gale says that an atheological argument is one that tries to "reveal a logical inconsistency in the theist's concept of god" in *On the Nature and Existence of God* (1991), p. 15. On fideism and "forms of life" consult Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion* (1993); Penelhum, *God and Skepticism: A Study in Skepticism and Fideism* (1983); Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion* (1993); and Nielsen and Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* (2005).

19 Much more can said about a-theology, and (a)theology or a/theology, etc., as far as religion is concerned. See for example Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (1987). See also Westphal, *Suspicion & Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism* (1993), and *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul* (2004). See also Ward, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (2001), and Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (2003).

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4 Methods and Modes of Atheology

The term 'atheology' dates to the seventeenth century, but it fell into disuse until it was revived by a twentieth-century philosopher of religion, Alvin Plantinga. Although he later allied with presuppositionalism, arguing that articles of Christian faith can serve as foundational knowledge, Plantinga took natural theology seriously and scrutinized atheology. In 1967 he defined theology's opposition as "natural atheology"—"the attempt, roughly, to show that, given what we know, it is impossible or unlikely that god exists."[1] Plantinga's term mirrored traditional theology's partition into revealed theology (grounded in knowledge from god) and natural theology (based on knowledge already accessible to people). As "revealed atheology" is incoherent, the 'natural' modifier to atheology can be omitted as redundant.

Atheology will not grant any sort of unnatural or revealed knowledge. What shall reasonably count as human knowledge will remain contested between theology and atheology, and arguments over mysticism and revelation are unavoidable. Still, atheology's capacity to appeal to human knowledge provides a broad neutral base to ground its arguments, without any metaphysical principles involved. Familiar ontological issues are not excluded, however. Plantinga included in atheology the discussions of typical major issues such as the problem of evil, paradoxes of omnipotence, challenges that god-belief is unverifiable and meaningless, and proofs that god does not exist. The way that both theism and atheism can appeal to normative matters as well as factual matters, such as commonly accepted moral norms, is also an attractive feature of Plantinga's expansive view of atheology.

As recounted in a later section, Ralph Cudworth's *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) depicted a "system of Atheology" as "Atheism swaggering under the glorious appearance of philosophy." Cudworth expected that theology could rely on sound philosophy to prove god's reality. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, dissenters and freethinkers were pondering alternatives to traditional theism.

Freethought and Atheology

Freethought remains a convenient label for questioning and criticizing religion, religious institutions, and civil authorities relying on religion.

Freethought can involve philosophizing about god, humanity, and nature (forming heresies), reveling in intense emotions (promoting spiritualisms), reforming religious practice and religious institutions (risking schisms), and rearranging church-state politics (seeking religious liberties). Sometimes freethought offers radical dissent by rejecting scripture or defying god's divinity (blasphemy), discrediting religious authorities (anticlericalism), abandoning the true faith (apostasy), or not believing god's reality (atheism). Impiety is not the destiny of most freethought, but fears over apostasy and atheism inspire the hostile religious agenda against all freethought. Those fears are not unfounded. Freethought's ample capacity for religious criticism and atheology can cause wavering faith, and produce doubting skeptics and bold atheists. Free-thinking has the capacity to lend momentum to trends towards rising secularity and irreligion across a population.[2]

Religious criticism, whether undertaken by religious or nonreligious critics, judges religion against prevailing standards: the common sense and moral sense of society, public expectations of civic responsibility, and the current laws of the nation. Religious critics find receptive audiences, but neither party needs to ponder why those standards prevail across society, how they are objectively valid, or whether they have exclusively nonreligious grounds. Religious criticism is effective where it has local force, but it can only have relative force locally, and audiences need not be aroused to the level of religious dissent. Atheology, by contrast, judges religious convictions against objective and universal standards having entirely nonreligious grounds, and expects religious people to rise to those standards by abandoning god-beliefs, at least to the point of skeptical doubt if not firm disbelief.

Four primary methods of atheology can be distinguished, depending on whether atheology relies on (a) rationality alone, (b) scientific reasoning, (c) moral norms of health, personal conduct, and social ethics or (d) human rights, civil rights, and justice. We may accordingly identify Rationalist atheology, Scientific atheology, Moral atheology, and Civil atheology. The next section explains them in detail.

The four main atheologies match up against four primary kinds of theology:

> Revealed theology asks and answers the question, Is a god needed to explain experiences of mystery and revelation? If so, then we should regard god with awe as supreme. *Rationalist atheology* finds no logical way to conclude anything about gods from human experience.
>
> Natural theology asks and answers the question, Is a god needed to explain the cosmos? If so, then we should revere god for our existence and habitat. *Rationalist atheology* critiques creation and design arguments, while *Scientific atheology* finds no explanatory role for god while exploring nature.
>
> Moral theology asks and answers the question, Is a god needed to ensure a natural and human orientation towards goodness? If so, then

> we should accordingly harmonize our personal and social lives. *Moral atheology* finds more ethical opportunities and outcomes by abandoning commitments to god.
>
> Civil theology asks and answers the question, Is a god needed to ensure that society conforms to civil order? If so, then we should ensure that everyone in society is properly religious. *Civil atheology* finds that no god is needed for maintaining social order and advancing justice.

The four primary atheologies, itemized here in contrast to the four theologies, were sporadically defended in classical Greece and Rome, they survived the Middle Ages, they gradually emerged during the Renaissance, and all four were fully revived by the eighteenth century across Europe.

Although these four atheologies can cohere together and lend support to each other, it should never be assumed that a freethinker utilizing one atheological method also endorses the other atheologies. For many centuries, the skepticism inherent to Rationalist atheology prevented many skeptics from expecting materialism to be reasonably established. And both skeptics and materialists were torn over whether to abandon religious morality, or call for revolutions of civil order. Each atheist freethinker was free to decide whether their intellectual dissent from religion would pair up with the public behavior of impiety. For example, many freethinkers during recent centuries have denied god but upheld religion's ethos as a guide to morality, or encouraged religious observance as beneficial to civic life.

What should be the best relationship between our knowledge of reality and our duty to society? By the eighteenth century, representative freethinkers had notably occupied four primary options. First, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), an English philosopher, defended materialism based on science while also upholding popular religion as a political tool for maintaining social harmony and government stability. Second, Epicurus (341–270 BCE), an ancient Greek philosopher, was known for recommending naturalism while casting scorn against popular religion and urging that people seek their own personal happiness. Third, Michel de Montaigne (1533–92), a French philosopher, perceived how religion has no basis in reason but he defended each person's duty to maintain faith in god. Fourth, Denis Diderot (1713–84), another French philosopher, could not find where reason could justify religion either, but he regarded blind faith as the enemy of reforming society and government.

The Four Atheologies

The method of atheology appealing only to common sense, simple reasoning, and basic logicality can be distinguished first. Since this atheology relies on ordinary rational capacities, it is labeled as Rationalist atheology. The second method of atheology, Scientific atheology, appeals to knowledge from science where needed to counter unreasonable religious claims. The third and fourth atheologies appeal to established norms and values.

Arguments against god-belief that point out its violations of moral norms are provided by Moral atheology. Arguments against god-belief that expose violations of social ethics and human rights are provided by Civil atheology. Typical atheological works do not try to be comprehensive by focusing on just one or another of these four atheologies.[3]

Rationalist atheology applies common rationality and basic logical thinking to skeptically doubt that gods are real.[4] Naturally, theology and Rationalist atheology disagree about whether a sound theological argument for god can be formulated. Consider a simplified example, imitating an argument offered by medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas in *Summa contra Gentiles* around 1265.[5]

1. The things we observe in nature come into existence because they are caused by some other thing(s).
2. It is inconceivable that something could be responsible for causing itself.
3. An endless chain of causes is not a conceivable explanation for the things in nature.
4. A uncaused First Cause that causes everything else is the only conceivable explanation for nature.
5. When there is only one conceivable explanation, it is reasonable to accept it as correct.
6. A First Cause causes everything else in nature, due to 4 and 5.
7. It is reasonable to think the First Cause of nature is an unnatural God.

Conclusion: God exists.

Rationalist atheology exposes dubious premises and inference gaps in this kind of argument.

Premise 1 assumes that everything natural has to be causally created, but some unchanging things might not have been created, such as fundamental physical energies and some of the basic laws they follow. Theology would first have to prove that nothing natural is uncreated. Pointing to the Big Bang cannot help, since cosmology may discover how other matters (quantum-level energies, for example) were responsible. That is why theology resorts to premises 2 and 3. Premise 2 seems plausible, but premise 3 can be disputed. An infinite chain of prior causes could account for all things, even if that infinity is not humanly imaginable. Conceivability must not be confused with imaginability: Mathematicians work with concepts of infinity without trying to picture them imaginatively, and scientists work with theoretical concepts too complex to be imagined in any detail. Premise 4 need not be accepted, since premise 3 remains dubious. Even if a First Cause could become a good explanation, it could still be part of nature—nothing about this argument allows theology to assume that a First Cause must be supernatural. Similarly, an infinite chain of causes could be entirely natural, as theology has not proven otherwise. Rationalist atheology must also point

out that premise 5 should not be accepted, halting this argument at skeptical doubt about all these possibilities, so Premise 6 cannot be known to be true. Finally, Premise 7 need not be accepted as true. Conceptions of the supreme deity vary greatly across the world's religions; supernatural theism is by no means a matter of consensus, especially if nonreligious people are counted too. Besides, this First Cause does not ensure providential oversight of the world or special attention to individuals, so it would not seem like a god to theists. This argument lacks enough good reasons for thinking that a god is real.

Scientific atheology differs from Rationalist atheology by applying science knowledge's and scientific methodologies, in addition to sound reasoning, to skeptically doubt whether any god is real.[6] That knowledge need not exceed the comprehension of most people, if they have some education. Information from geology, astronomy, biology, or human physiology often suffices to show that no religious explanation for worldly matters is required. Scientific atheology does not assume that naturalism is right, since that philosophical worldview is not yet part of established human knowledge.[7] Science does explain matters once taken to be signs from god, such as earthquakes and comets. No deity had to design the structure of the eye or the brain, arrange the order of our solar system's planets, and place the stars in the heavens. If a theological argument asks us to detect godly activity in quantum-level phenomena, our universe's origin, or the evolution of life, Scientific atheology counters by explaining why divine interventions cannot be inferred from the scientific evidence.

Moral atheology criticizes churchly and personal commitments to god on the basis of normative values which all humanity should respect.[8] The schematic form to a typical argument is this: "If religion's god is real, then a follower must accept a violation of an important value, but it is unreasonable to accept that violation, therefore belief in that god should be abandoned." Moral atheology appeals to standards for healthy human functioning, basic moral norms, and reasonable social ethics. These standards are those most widely shared by civil societies, and most of the world's religions already endorse them, even if religious ethics and secular ethics cannot agree about all moral matters. Nor does Moral atheology have to wait for ethical theories, such as deontology and utilitarianism, to converge in agreement. Most of the world already knows enough about right and wrong. Any deity commanding or encouraging murder, terror, suicide, harms to innocent people, and harms to oneself is unworthy of anyone's faith.

Civil atheology appeals to social justice, political rights such as civil rights and liberties, and human rights in order to criticize god-belief.[9] Although the concept of human rights is not yet as universal as could be hoped, most cultures and religions are able to recognize some human rights. Civil societies regard degradations to life, safety, liberty, and property as extremely serious offenses. Complete agreement about human rights is a goal for the future, so Civil atheology does not presume that the universalization of a

specific set of human rights or civil rights is practically achievable or even theoretically demonstrable. Only a current consensus among most peoples about harms, rights, and justice, however minimal, is part of the body of human knowledge about proper civic affairs. That consensus is a reasonable basis for rejecting religious convictions responsible for any violations. Gods requiring disrespect for human dignity and human rights, or gods that demand injustices or degrading inequalities, are gods that deserve to be abandoned as unreal.

Modes of Atheology

There are three primary modes of pursuing atheology: the pedagogical, practical, and philosophical modes.

Pedagogical atheology is instruction for children and adolescents explaining why faith, religion, and quasi-religious beliefs should be avoided.[10] This age-appropriate atheology tackles only broad concerns with mild intensity, without indoctrination into atheism as if it were a creed to be blindly accepted. Children can be encouraged to ask questions and think critically about such things as empirical exploration, basic science, exposing superstition and magical thinking, and skeptical inquiry into the paranormal and supernatural. Children can also be introduced to the world's major religions, pointing out all their different gods and notions of afterlives, along with moral disagreements found among religions. Paired with a cross-cultural and historical interest in religion, and the humanistic encouragement of respect and toleration, pedagogical atheology need not inspire anger or hostility towards religious people or any religion. The primary goals are helping children with their critical thinking skills, the confidence to question everything, and the methods of self-guided inquiry. Pedagogical atheology, along with humanist education for children, is a rich field for expansion and enrichment. Future progress will take advantage of developmental and educational psychology, the study of cognitive biases, and empirical research into magical thinking and religious susceptibility.

Practical atheology offers persuasive discussions about atheism designed for adult audiences. It utilizes common sense and logic, a measure of science, moral and civic norms, and a judicious selection of life wisdom to explain religion's failings, recount theology's fallacies, encourage the naturalistic worldview, sustain a lifetime nonreligious stance, and utilize secular ethics such as utilitarianism and humanism.[11] Intellectual history can also introduce a wide audience to the legacy of irreligion.[12] This genre of popular practical atheology goes back to nineteenth-century nonbelievers such as Charles Bradlaugh in England and Robert Green Ingersoll in America. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Little Blue Books series of hundreds of pamphlets published by Emanuel Haldeman-Julius connected free-thinking and atheist writers with a vast readership across America—over 20 million copies sold in the single year of 1927. Publishing over one

hundred of his pamphlets in this series, Joseph McCabe was a leading voice of rationalism, atheism, and irreligion in America until his death in 1955.[13] In England, Harold Blackham popularized humanism with his books such as *The Human Tradition* (1953), and he led the British Humanist Association for many years. Paul Kurtz re-invigorated popular atheism in America, by founding the Council for Secular Humanism and its magazine *Free Inquiry* in 1980. Practical atheology offers well-rounded insights into living without religion and holding a secular worldview, designed for adults wavering away from religion or seeking an affirmative nonbelieving lifestance. Practical atheology is also related to counseling for psychological issues and mental trauma that people suffer within religious settings. Helping people obtain access to mental health care and transition their lives away from harmful religiosity can assist people deciding for themselves to become nonreligious. Even clergy are admitting disbelief and walking away from their churches.[14]

Philosophical atheology takes atheology to its highest intellectual level, distinguishing its tasks into rational, scientific, moral, and civil atheologies. It applies anything and everything within the realm of human knowledge, from logic and observation to confirmed science and objective values, for its agenda of showing how nothing godly need be taken as real. Philosophical atheology does not primarily aim at persuasively deconverting the religious towards nonbelieving secularity, or exhorting nonbelievers towards firm atheist or humanist commitments. Those are goals of practical atheology, which can speak to wide audiences with straightforward and inspirational language. Practical atheology can rhetorically engage religion and effectively rehearse simpler counter-arguments against simplistic theology, but the sophisticated arguments handling theology's intricacies and novelties are developed by philosophical atheology, with systematic atheology at its core.

The limitations to applauding atheism without systematic philosophical guidance are on full display in New Atheism. Most writings related to this upstart genre, inaugurated by Sam Harris in *The End of Faith* (2004) and Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* (2006), only engage in religious criticism for public audiences to polemical and political effect, offering at best an entryway into practical atheology. The vulnerabilities of New Atheism are not about whether it grapples with every twist and turn of academic theology, but rather with its lack of atheological coherence. New Atheism's criticisms against religion tend to be narrowly pointed, leaving broad issues about atheism and nonreligious worldviews unaddressed. Skepticism is sharply wielded against anything religious, while no skepticism is permitted about science's capacity to explain the world or materialism's delivery of fulfilling human lives. Many books in this genre defend science over religion while ignoring problems for establishing naturalism, as if atheism's own worldview was secure.[15] Others decry religion's irrationalities, and the naïve credulity of the faithful, as if the nonreligious must be the paragons of rationality.

Theology has suggested that much about atheism is just a misbegotten creature of theology,[16] but that view at most applies to polemical features of dogmatic movements such as New Atheism. Popular atheism can independently display its own limitations. Many atheist authors criticize religion's moral failings without accounting for ethics among nonbelievers, as if sound morals or social justice automatically comes with irreligion. Atheists disparaging religion's notion of free will overlook whether moral responsibility exists in a deterministic world. Some atheists will deny moral responsibility as a myth, even as they denounce immoral behavior by religious people. Other atheists announce that after religion evaporates, no one has to think that there are worthy values beyond personal interests, or that there are any objective moral norms. More atheists offer predictions that scientific research into human genes, or brains, will soon explain what constitutes human happiness, moral value, and ethical duty.[17] Atheists typically set out from their own idiosyncratic viewpoints and resort to satirical, rhetorical, and polemical tactics without much concern for overall clarity or coherence. Theologians enjoy no advantage by comparison, however. Religious reactions to New Atheism, for example, have been similarly disputatious and disorganized in response.[18]

Systematic atheology organizes the most effective methods of philosophical atheology. Those methods were shaped and developed long ago, and they are impressively sophisticated today. Since the Renaissance, five centuries of Western free-thinking has resulted in the emergence and flourishing of religious criticism, atheological philosophizing, and skepticism towards gods. Not since the Roman world of Seneca, Lucian, and Plutarch, or perhaps back to the Greek era of Socrates and Plato five hundred years earlier, could such an impressive scale of free-thinking flourish in the West.

Narrating Atheism's Development

Distinguishing and correlating the many forms of freethought, and tracking the disagreements and alliances between them as carefully as describing their antagonism against religion, is a project still under development. Secularists occasionally assemble histories of religious dissent and unbelief, typically holding up noble exemplars in a flattering light, and arranging atheists in a sequence to suggest reason's destined victory over irrational faith. George Jacob Holyoake, England's principal secularist of the nineteenth century and the first atheist historiographer of his movement, structured this optimistic genre.[19] It aimed at aggressively counter-balancing the derogatory accounts of freethought and atheism composed by theologians.[20] Only a broadly historical view, tracing many diverse streams of mutually influential thought across the religious-secular spectrum, can do justice to the development of distinctive varieties of disbelief.[21]

The possibility that atheists have taken contrary stands on the meaning and justification for atheism has rarely been entertained, much less explored, by

the historiography of unbelief. Freethought was never a homogenous intellectual movement, and neither atheism nor secularism have been monolithic. Freethinkers have wielded many atheological tactics to scrutinize religion without necessarily becoming atheists themselves, while atheists adapted those tactics to skeptically question everything about religion. Arguing that religious authorities cannot actually know what they think they know, and are not as righteous as they want to appear, can make others doubt what is truly knowable about god.[22] Arguing that the stories recounted in scriptures could not be as truthfully testimonial as they appear can make others figure that human wit is actually responsible for holy writ.[23] Arguing that scriptural commands and holy laws are contrary to what common sense knows is right can make others wonder if anything divine really stands behind religious edicts.[24] Arguing that god cannot fulfill our expectations about true righteousness and goodness can make others wonder why a god of dubious goodness is worthy of anyone's faith.[25]

These distinct atheological arguments, and the number of additional argumentative tactics also used by freethought and atheism, illustrate how there is no singular essence or unique core to all of atheism beyond its basic indifference towards gods. Atheology put into practice is far more complex than the one derisive word of 'atheist' could ever suggest. A stark choice between regarding atheism as a hypothetical construct of theology, or as an independent intellectual movement, is unnecessary.[26] Comprehending atheism is not possible without acknowledging long-standing internecine struggles over its meaning and its message for the world. Atheology as a whole should be theoretically united; in practice atheism has been contentiously divided. This is by no means a recent historical situation, and modernist Christian theology did not spawn it. From the Presocratic Greeks down to the Hellenistic period, and then on to the early Christian era, methods of atheology have flourished in parallel and in conflict with each other.

Two primary kinds of philosophical atheology, a skepticism towards religion and a worldview to replace supernaturalism, emerged in Europe after 1500 thanks to rediscoveries about ancient philosophies. Before then, the intellectual world rarely contemplated atheological views with serious intent, and hardly any endorsement.[27] With surprising rapidity, the outlines of skeptical agnosticism and atheistic naturalism began to assemble during the Renaissance. However, these two atheological strategies stood opposed since the times of ancient Greece, each claiming for itself the sole possession of the true heritage of reason and free-thinking.

The term "atheology" was itself a contentious term from its own beginnings. It was brought into wide usage by Ralph Cudworth, the great Cambridge scholar of the late seventeenth century. He vaulted to prominence with his philosophical defense of theism, published in 1678 as *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*: *The First Part, Wherein All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted and its Impossibility Demonstrated*. Chapter 2 starts with a list of accusations against atheism, and defines a

"system of Atheology" as "Atheism swaggering under the glorious appearance of philosophy."[28] In Cudworth's view, setting aside his evident scorn, atheism is the denial of religion, and atheology is the effort to rationally justify atheism by constructing an intellectual worldview that lacks god, or at least the "true" god. Cudworth presents each atheological system as a serious body of thought more than worthy of careful dissection and intellectual refutation. Although Cudworth knew an atheist when he saw one in Thomas Hobbes, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* examines Greek and Roman philosophies. His focus on system builders among the ancients was notably different from the usual theological attacks against unbelievers. For example, the earlier treatise by Leonardus Lessius (1554–1623) titled *De providentia numinis et animi immortalitate libri duo adversus Atheos et Politicos* (Divine Providence and the Immortality of the Soul against Atheists and Politicians, 1613), identifies an assortment of specific atheist targets among ancient sophists, atomists, and satirists. The sophists are Diagoras of Melos and Protagoras of Abdera; the atomists are Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius; and the satirist is Lucian. Many of Lessius's arguments are borrowed from Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*. The 'politicians' to which the book title refers are Machiavelli and his imitators, who never endorse atheism yet they treat religion as a useful tool for a sovereign's domination of the people. Both Cudworth and Lessius, like Thomas Aquinas before them, did expect that theology could rely on sound philosophy to prove the existence of a supreme being.

Cudworth classifies his selected ancient atheologies into four types with their own labels: (1) the 'Hylopathian' view that matter has no qualities of life yet can it can generate all physical things and their changes, represented by Anaximander; (2) the Atomist view that matter itself is dynamically in motion and rearrangement yet not capable of feeling or life, represented by Democritus; (3) the 'Cosmoplastick' view that all of nature is in itself insentient yet it forms a dynamic and orderly whole, represented by Stoics; and (4) the 'Hylozoick' view that each smallest part of matter is vitally dynamic in itself but lacks feeling or sentience, represented by Strato. The first and second types agree that the ultimate material has no features of life or vitality at all, while the third and fourth types permit ultimate materials to possess inner vitality without sentience or purpose.

Cudworth respected those ancient nature philosophies enough to analyze them for careful refutation. However, he had no respect for the typical atheist carried away by ignorance and folly:

> Besides these philosophic Atheists, whose several forms we have now described, it cannot be doubted, but that there have been in all ages many other Atheists that have not at all philosophized, nor pretended to maintain any particular Atheistic system or hypothesis, in a way of reason, but were only led by a certain dull and sottish, though confident disbelief of whatsoever they could not either see or feel; which kind of

> Atheists may, therefore, well be accounted enthusiastical or fanatical Atheists.[29]

These irrational atheists lack any atheology, they have no excuse for their disbelief, and they deserve no protection from society's reproval and punishment because their behavior is reprehensible. Cudworth's distinction between intellectual and practical atheism was typical for that era, and its application was bound up with wider political implications to dealing with radical dissent.[30]

A loyal friend of Cudworth, and an admirer of Stoicism, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), sympathized with Christian freethinkers. He himself endorsed a 'theism' amounting to deism's fixation on divine providence and pantheism's stress on divine immanence. Arriving about the same near-natural atheology as Seneca, he stopped short of denying any sort of sentience to the cosmos. Shaftesbury was able to shield skeptical atheists from condemnation, in his essay *The Moralists* (1711):

> The word or name of *Atheist* may possibly occasion some disturbance, by being made to describe two characters so very different as His who *absolutely denies*, and His who *only doubts*. Now he who *doubts*, may possibly lament his own unhappiness, and wish to be convinc'd. He who *denies* is daringly presumptuous, and sets up an opinion against the interest of mankind and being of society. 'Tis easily seen that *one* of these persons may bear a due respect to the Magistrate and Laws, tho not *the other*; who being obnoxious to them, is therefore punishable. But how the former is punishable *by Man* will be hard to say, unless the Magistrate had dominion over Minds, as well as over actions and behavior; and had power to exercise an inquisition within the inmost bosoms and secret thoughts of Men.[31]

Bernard Mandeville's *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness* (1720) similarly distinguished two types of atheists, the dubious and the disruptive:

> Atheists are either Speculative or Practical. Speculative Atheists are those unhappy People, who, being too fond of Knowledge or Reasoning, are first deluded into Scepticism, till, unable to extricate themselves from the Mazes of Philosophy, they are at last betray'd into a Disbelief of every Thing they cannot comprehend, and become the most convincing Evidences of the shallowness of Human Understanding. The Number of these has always been very small; and, as they are commonly studious, peaceable Men, the Hurt they do to the Publick is inconsiderable. To make this not appear a Paradox, we are but to reflect on what it is Men are govern'd by in the Conduct of their Lives, and we shall find, that very few act from the Principles they profess, whilst all the rest are

> sway'd by their Passions and Inclinations; and therefore it ought not to appear more strange to us, that an Atheist should be a quiet moral Man, than that a Christian should lead a very wicked Life.
>
> Practical Atheists are generally Libertines, who first have been guilty of all manner of Vice and Profaneness, and afterwards, not daring to reflect on the Enormity of their Sins, or the Punishment they deserve from the Vengeance of Heaven, lay hold on Atheistical Arguments, to screen themselves from their own Fears, and only deny a God, because they wish there was none. Practical Atheists, as they commonly spend their Lives in Riots, and ridiculing every thing that is holy, generally die (unless they happen to repent) in uncommon Agonies and Despair.[32]

The next notable use of 'atheology' after Cudworth did not apply it to philosophical thought, but rather to dangerous sedition. It came from the sharp pen of satirist Jonathan Swift, and his meaning for atheology was narrower than Cudworth's. In 1713 he published "Mr. C—ns's Discourse on Free Thinking, put into plain English, by way of Abstract, for the use of the Poor." Swift was no friend of religious toleration. He detested the public surfacing of heretical and blasphemous writings, so the publication in that year of Anthony Collins's *A Discourse of Free-Thinking* promptly aroused Swift's angry scorn. Swift equated free-thinking with atheology: "a brief complete body of Atheology seemed yet wanting till this irrefragable discourse appeared."[33] Collins's discourse of 'atheology', as Swift labeled it, was designed to primarily defend the principle of free thought (an idea only a few decades old by them) and free speech (also a rather new concept). Like his more respectable friends, Shaftesbury and John Locke, Collins was an Enlightenment figure convinced that people have the right to rationally judge what should be believed and disbelieved. He wrote, "By *Free-Thinking* then I mean, *The Use of the Understanding, in endeavouring to find out the Meaning of any Proposition whatsoever, in considering the nature of the Evidence for or against it, and in judging of it according to the seeming Force or Weakness of the Evidence*." Collins continued to critique Christianity's bases in revelation and miracles in *A Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724).[34]

In Swift's view, the apparent deism and open denial of revelation and immortality by Collins is an atheism not be heard or tolerated. Collins's impudent defense of the right to publicly speak about how to question religion leads inexorably to anarchism. Freethought about everything would include moral issues of personal conduct and political issues of proper social order. Encouraging the free disputation of religion is not really any different, according to Swift and so many of his elite class, from encouraging liberty to abandon propriety, violate the law, and solicit revolt. Unlike Cudworth, Swift refused to recognize atheology as an intelligible system of thought in the first place, since that would bestow far too much credit. Instead, Swift equated defenses of atheism with depraved and chaotic free-thinking, and treated free-thinking as destructively unacceptable free speech.

Atheology meant two very different things for Cudworth and Swift, and these alternatives have dominated Western discussions of atheism ever since. Is atheism the rational acceptance of a nonreligious philosophy, so that atheology would be the intellectual elaboration of a worldview lacking a god? Alternatively, is atheism just hostile blasphemy against religion and what religion supports, and atheology merely the disagreeable rantings of disordered minds experimenting with perversions and disturbing the peace? These two contrary perspectives upon atheism and atheology cannot be blended together. Obviously, they both involve disagreeing with religion, but they do not agree on how to deny religion. These two options fundamentally diverge over whether atheism must amount to a philosophical worldview without gods, or a stubborn rebellion against religious authorities.

Atheology was hardly a consolidated body of thought at that time. Yet what little coherence it possessed was left splintered and bitterly contested after the polemics of Cudworth and Swift. Thinkers advocating atheology were sharply divided over goals and tactics, opposed to each other as much as to religion. That division lasted for almost three centuries. Materialists sought an ambitious worldview to replace god's work, and its atheism consists of leaving nothing for a god to do and nowhere for a god to do it. Skeptics used strict reason to doubt all ambitious worldviews, and its atheism consists of claiming that knowledge of god is impossible. Agnostics and many skeptics still depict themselves as a tribe apart from atheists, claiming that only agnosticism preserves the true heritage of rationalist skepticism, which perpetuates that prolonged atheological schism.

The wider religious environment for this intellectual debate was never far from anyone's mind. Publicly advocating any sort of doubting nonconformity could have significant social and civil consequences, ranging from public notoriety to criminal prosecution. Freethinkers had to challenge hostile prejudices against nonconformists depicting them as corrupt and sinful miscreants, dangerously perverting not only their own virtue but social harmony as well. The boldest atheists have struck back at religion's presumed ethical superiority, suggesting that religion slowed humanity's progress and controlled society for the powerful. Irreligion supplements the materialist and skeptical approaches to atheology with two additional agendas undercutting religion. Moral criticism treated religion as a conservative belief system obstructing the ethical growth of its followers, and its atheism consists of devaluing religion as immoral. Political criticism treated religion as a social institution deserving replacement as civilization advances, and its atheism consists of regarding religion as a human invention.

Routes from freethought to irreligion allow one to infer that god-belief is unreasonable and no gods are real. That irreligion must not be misunderstand. Materialism is not the knowledge that no gods are real, but its natural worldview implies that there is no reason for gods to be real. Skepticism is not the conclusion that no gods exist, but its rational standards imply

that no one has good reason to think gods do exist. Anti-religious moralism is not the verdict that no gods exist, but it expects that gods involved with immorality should be abandoned to advance ethical growth. Anti-religious politics is not the pronouncement that no gods shall be worshipped, but its view that religion was made by us implies that we can modify it or make god-belief disposable.

Worldview atheologians offer reasons why there is nothing for any god to do, by describing nature as everlasting, self-sustaining, essentially dynamic (nothing had to set it into motion), and intrinsically generative to produce all things within nature (no godly crafting is needed). Skeptical atheologians offer reasons why there is nothing for anyone to understand about gods, by describing humanity as too cognitively limited and biased to really be acquainted with gods. Moral atheologians appeal to common norms to judge when gods are poor moral examples that turn their followers into monsters. Civil atheologians appeal to norms of well-ordered society to fault religion for supporting authoritarians and slowing the progress of justice and equality.

Premier atheologians combine atheological strategies. For example, an account of how nature produces all life, including humanity, should also explain why humanity would naturally generate religions. Another example is the combination of a skeptical account of the way that religions really cannot possess knowledge of gods with a moralist design for the good society that wisely manages religiosity instead of submissively obeying religion. A natural atheology along the lines of Anaximander/Democritus was, for a generation or two, evenly matched by an Anaxagoras/Socratic natural theology. However, by the time that Plato was writing his later dialogues and Aristotle had founded his own school, their combined determination to credit a single eternal and powerful deity for controlling the cosmos overmatched all other Presocratic philosophies. Epicurus arrived a generation later with a materialist/historicist perspective on humanity and a skeptical/moralist account of the reasonable life, to provide a serious naturalistic challenge to the Greek theological schools. The materialist/historicist combination in atheology would not arise again until the work of Thomas Hobbes (and then Baron D'Holbach and Ludwig Büchner). The next skeptical/moralist combination was offered by Denis Diderot (followed by David Hume and John Stuart Mill).

There are several atheological ways to explain and promulgate one's godlessness, and endorsing one kind of atheology carries no necessary endorsement of the others. For example, the worldview and skeptical agendas do not necessarily lend themselves to either deviating from religious morality or violating the civil order. Designers of naturalistic worldviews, and doubters with skeptical criticisms, can imitate the morality of the environing public religion, and they may refrain from challenging religion's civic domination. The primary methods of atheology, and their multiple combinations, are examined from their Greek beginnings in the next chapter.

Notes

1 Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (1967), p. vii.
2 Bruce, *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (2011).
3 Essays applying all of these atheologies are collected in two volumes edited by Martin and Monnier: *The Impossibility of God* (2003) and *The Improbability of God* (2006).
4 Examples include Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God* (1982); Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (1996); Everett, *The Non-Existence of God* (2004); Oppy, *Arguing About Gods* (2006); Shook, *The God Debates: A Twenty-First Century Guide for Atheists and Believers (and Everyone in Between)* (2010).
5 This argument is repeated in his *Summa Theologica* (1997), p. 22. Consult Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary* (2016).
6 Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (2007); Stenger, *Quantum Gods: Creation, Chaos, and the Search for Cosmic Consciousness* (2009); Philipse, *God in the Age of Science? A Critique of Religious Reason* (2012).
7 Fales, "Naturalism and Physicalism" (2007).
8 Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism* (1987); Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument From Evil* (2006); Aikin and Talisse, *Reasonable Atheism: A Moral Case for Respectful Disbelief* (2011).
9 Cliteur, *The Secular Outlook: In Defense of Moral and Political Secularism* (2010); Kurtz, *Multi-Secularism: A New Agenda* (2010).
10 McGowan, ed., *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids Without Religion* (2007); McGowan et al., *Raising Freethinkers: A Practical Guide for Parenting Beyond Belief* (2009); Hitchcock, *Disbelief 101: A Young Person's Guide to Atheism* (2009); Arel, *Parenting Without God: How to Raise Moral, Ethical and Intelligent Children, Free From Religious Dogma* (2015); Manning, *Losing Our Religion: How Unaffiliated Parents Are Raising Their Children* (2015).
11 Smith, *Why Atheism?* (2000); Grayling, *Meditations for the Humanist: Ethics for a Secular Age* (2002); Price, *The Reason-Driven Life: What Am I Here on Earth For?* (2006); Barker, *The Good Atheist: Living a Purpose-Filled Life Without God* (2011); Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life Without Illusions* (2011); McGowan, *Atheism for Dummies* (2013); Ruse, *Atheism: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2015).
12 Hecht, *Doubt, A History: The Great Doubters and Their Legacy of Innovation From Socrates and Jesus to Thomas Jefferson and Emily Dickinson* (2010); Schneider, *God in Proof: The Story of a Search From the Ancients to the Internet* (2013).
13 Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (1985); Radest, *The Devil and Secular Humanism: The Children of the Enlightenment* (1990); Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (2004); Cooke, *A Rebel to His Last Breath: Joseph McCabe and Rationalism* (2001).
14 Kurtz, *Embracing the Power of Humanism* (2000); Winell, "The Challenge of Leaving Religion and Becoming Secular" (2017); Ray, *Sex & God: How Religion Distorts Sexuality* (2012); Dennett and LaScola, *Caught in The Pulpit: Leaving Belief Behind* (2013).
15 Pigliucci, "New Atheism and the Scientistic Turn in the Atheism Movement" (2013). See also Cotter et al., ed., *New Atheism: Critical Perspectives and Contemporary Debates* (2017).
16 Dupré, "On the Intellectual Sources of Modern Atheism" (1999); Onfray, *Atheist Manifesto* (2007).

17 Kaufman "Can Science Determine Moral Values? A Reply to Sam Harris" (2012).

18 Mohler, *Atheism Remix: A Christian Confronts the New Atheists* (2008); Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (2008); Zacharias, *The End of Reason: A Response to the New Atheists* (2008); McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (2011); Hughes, ed., *The Unknown God: Sermons Responding to the New Atheists* (2013).

19 Holyoake's book *The Origin and Nature of Secularism* (1896) recounts how secularism was inevitable, once reason was set free from religion and freethought reached its maturity. Concurring assessments include Samuel Porter Putnam, *Four Hundred Years of Freethought* (1894); Benn, *The History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (1906); and Bury, *A History of Freedom of Thought* (1913). At the other end of the century, Larue's *Freethought Across the Centuries* (1996) is a recent example of this same dramatic theme. A sympathetic overview is also sketched by Watson, *The Age of Atheists: How We Have Sought to Live Since the Death of God* (2014), and also by some contributors to Bullivant and Ruse, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (2014). Notable treatises covering freethought and atheism around the world are Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte Im Abendlande* (1920–23), and Robertson, *A History of Freethought* (1936). Early biographical compilations of unbelievers include Maréchal, *Dictionnaire des athées anciens et modernes* (1800), and Wheeler, *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers of All Ages and Nations* (1889). On European unbelief see also Lange, *The History of Materialism* (1925); Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (1987); Minois, *Histoire de l'athéisme: les incroyants dans le monde occidental des origines à nos jours* (1998); Buckley, *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism* (2004); Nash, *Blasphemy in the Christian World: A History* (2007), and Hyman, *A Short History of Atheism* (2010).

20 A few balanced philosophical accounts did appear during the nineteenth century. Cairns's *Unbelief in the Eighteenth Century as Contrasted With Its Earlier and Later History* (1881) is a notably civil work. However, the consensus lingered that disbelief is the result of nothing but ignorance, irrationality, and immorality. Blackie did not overlook any variation upon these woeful causes in *The Natural History of Atheism* (1877), nor did Flint's *Anti-Theistic Theories* (1879). Farrar's *A Critical History of Free Thought in Reference to the Christian Religion* (1862) is impressively thorough by comparison, and lends religious dissent far more credit for reasoned argument. Farrar's Preface noted how his account, while unable to approve atheism, did not descend to Van Mildert's level of pointing to Satanic temptations as the ultimate cause of atheist error and depravity. Van Mildert, Lord Bishop of Durham, had composed a two-volume collection of dogmatic sermons, *An Historical View of the Rise and Progress of Infidelity* (1806), which went through five editions and stayed in print for over forty years. German readers had access to fair accounts of unbelief in the early nineteenth century, such as Tittmann's *Ueber Supranaturalismus, Rationalismus und Atheismus* (1816). Even Reimannus's *Historia universalis atheismi et atheorum falso & merito suspectorum apud Judaeos, ethnicos, Christianos, Muhamedanos* (1725) was still informative a century later. Latin readers could consult the earliest comprehensive survey of atheology by Johann Franz Buddeus, *Theses theologicae de atheismo et superstitione* (1717), which was translated into French as *Traité de l'athéisme et de la superstition* (1740). The earliest history of atheism may be Theophilus Spizelius's *Scrutinium Atheismi Historico-Aetiologicum* (1663). Early works by theologians surveying unorthodoxy and atheism are discussed by Robertson in his introductory chapter to *A History of Freethought* (1936).

21 Works of broad scope to consult include Fabro, *God in Exile: Modern Atheism, a Study of the Internal Dynamic of Modern Atheism, From Its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day* (1968); Masterson, *Atheism and Alienation* (1971); Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (2001); Taliaferro, *Evidence and Faith: Philosophy and Religion Since the Seventeenth Century* (2005); Curran, *Atheism, Religion and Enlightenment in Pre-Revolutionary Europe* (2012); and Nadon, ed., *Enlightenment and Secularism: Essays on the Mobilization of Reason* (2013).

22 The Reformation had as much impact, if not more, on expanding freethought than Renaissance fascination with the ancients, as religious intellectuals across the Protestant-Catholic chasm challenged each other's legitimacy and authority. See Levi, *Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis* (2002); Mortimer and Robertson, ed., *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy, 1600–1750* (2012); and Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt: The Religious Roots of Unbelief From Luther to Marx* (2016).

23 See Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism of the Bible* (2006). A contemporary example of an atheological challenge to Biblical veracity is Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* (2003). A sophisticated atheological foundation for testing scriptural reliability has been accomplished by Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (2012). A little historical common sense along with some logicality easily reduces claims for Biblical literalism to nonsense. Blaming philosophy for Biblical criticism only allows fundamentalist theology to deceive itself about its own faults; see Geisler, ed., *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of Its Philosophical Roots* (2004).

24 Freethought, no less among radical Christians than nonbelievers, has challenged scriptural justifications for genocide, slavery, racism, feudalism, patriarchy, and many other evils over the course of its long history. The role of apostates is explored in Bromley, *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements* (1998). On feminism see Besant, *My Path to Atheism* (1885); Gage, *Woman, Church and State: A Historical Account of the Status of Woman Through the Christian Ages* (1893); Gaylor, ed., *Women Without Superstition: "No Gods—No Masters": The Collected Writings of Women Freethinkers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1997); Kirkley, *Rational Mothers and Infidel Gentlemen: Gender and American Atheism, 1865–1915* (2000); and Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women's Emancipation, England 1830–1914* (2013). On race, see Pinn, *By These Hands: A Documentary History of African American Humanism* (2001); Johnson, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Toward Agnosticism, 1868–1934* (2008); Hutchinson, *Moral Combat: Black Atheists, Gender Politics, and the Values Wars* (2011); Pinn, *The End of God-Talk: An African American Humanist Theology* (2012); and Hutchinson, *Godless Americana: Race and Religious Rebels* (2013). Contemporary atheism emphasizes the dangerous "ethics" of scripture and religion. See Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (2005), and Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007). See also two volumes edited by Loftus: *The Christian Delusion* (2010) and *The End of Christianity* (2011).

25 Good atheological treatments are in Drange, *Nonbelief & Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God* (1998); and Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument From Evil* (2006).

26 See Wotton's discussion of important alternatives in "New Histories of Atheism" (1992).

27 Febvre's *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle: La religion de Rabelais* (1942) denies the existence of atheists in the medieval or renaissance worlds, recounting the obstructions to expressing atheism in the sixteenth century. See

the translation, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (1982), chaps. 9–11. See also Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1984).

28 Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe, Wherein All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism Is Confuted and Its Impossibility Demonstrated* (1678/1820), vol. 1, p. 175. On the philosophical and theological contexts to Cudworth's views on atheism, see Popkin, "Cudworth" (1992). See also Lowry, *The Philosophy of Ralph Cudworth* (1884), and Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation* (1951). Cudworth was not the first European scholar to extensively survey ancient systems of thought, but his survey was more influential than earlier attempts, such as those of Vossius in *De theologia gentili* (1642) and *De philosophorum sectic liber* (1657). Surveys of Cudworth's intellectual context are provided by Walker, *Reason and Religion in Late Seventeenth-Century England: The Politics and Theology of Radical Dissent* (2013), and Hickman, *Eighteenth-Century Dissent and Cambridge Platonism: Reconceiving the Philosophy of Religion* (2017).

29 Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, p. 290.

30 See Zurbuchen, "Religion and Society" (2006).

31 Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1714), vol. 2, pp. 260–261. Consult Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640–1740* (1995), chap. 7.

32 Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness* (1720), p. 4–5. Consult Simonazzi, "Atheism, Religion and Society in Mandeville's Thought" (2015).

33 Quoted from its reprinting as Swift, "On Mr. Collin's *Discourse of Free-Thinking*" (1784), p. 193.

34 Collins, *A Discourse of Free-Thinking, Occasion'd by the Rise and Growth of a Sect call'd Free-Thinkers* (1713), p. 5 (italics in original). On Collins, see O'Higgins, *Anthony Collins, the Man and His Works* (1970); Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (1988), chap. 3; and Taranto, *Du deisme a l'atheisme: la libre-pensee d'Anthony Collins* (2000).

5 Atheology's Ancient Heritage

Atheology is about as old as any philosophical speculation. In the beginnings of philosophy we can already discern distinct atheologies. Western atheology was inaugurated by the Greeks before science or theology were established, and atheology was pursued by the Romans before monotheism reached their empire. Rather than anachronistically imposing modern notions of atheism or naturalism on ancient civilizations, only the gradual emergence of philosophy and atheology can be tentatively explored in terms they understood. Naturalistic philosophy did not erupt fully-developed and divorced from all mythological thought, nor did philosophical atheism spring from a thorough-going revolt from religion. Mythological thought in Presocratic Greece was already becoming more intellectual, and no one of that era was treating religion as an isolatable cultural matter to repudiate. Rather, philosophical atheology and intellectual theology shared their protean forms in symbiotic dependencies, each growing through developing relations with each other, in both cooperative and antagonistic ways.

The Greeks had a word for what is natural, *phusis*, to indicate what brings forth, what engenders, or what gives birth. The closest correlative Latin term is *natus*, yielding words like 'natal' for 'birth', and a related word, *natura*, indicates the cause of a thing's origin as its own kind. Ancient philosophers gradually applied *phusis* and *natura* in more general senses to point out worldly processes ultimately responsible for all the variety to environing things. The concept of *phusis* became the idea of the 'physical', and *natura* acquired its related significance for the 'natural'. Collapsing them together, or contrasting them with the supernatural, is a modern idea, so due caution is required.

What existed as *phusis* or *natura* for the ancients was not automatically divine. The Greek and Latin languages already had words for 'god'—*theos* in Greek and *deus* or *divus* in Latin. If *phusis* or *natura* should also be regarded as divine, as early thinkers speculated, then their convergence or unification must be explained. There is no abrupt departure from mythological thinking here, as if philosophy or science began with a blank slate. However, the Greeks began to ponder this core question about the nature of the gods because they knew about many mythic accounts from other

cultures, they needed no approval from priestly authorities, they sought reasoned conceptions of the divine rather than more tales about the gods, and they were applying novel terminology to describe the world. The transition from mythic thought to philosophical thinking was already occurring when Hesiod's *Theogony* (seventh century BCE) proposed that the primeval origin of everything was a "Chaos" lacking any definite features and having no divine origin.[1]

This chapter selectively tracks primary themes of philosophical atheology as they emerged in their characteristics forms, and it must not be mistaken for an attempt to fully recount atheology's complex intellectual history.

Presocratic Greek Atheology

Philosophy gradually emerged by articulating and developing distinctive methods for forming reasonable explanations. Those emerging methodologies did deal with the supremely divine, but their articulation of what requires explanation and what sorts of accounts are good explanations soon altered conceptions of both the divine and the natural. That philosophizing allowed the Greeks to investigate nature without anthropomorphizing it first, or expecting that nature was designed for human benefit. After the Greeks next began to explore worldly phenomena to improve theories about nature's patterns, cycles, and powers, the thin beginnings of scientific thinking were underway.[2]

As for the gods, their fickle and frightful personalities became less relevant to their powerful roles guaranteeing cosmic order and stability. The gods, like anything explaining nature's ways, must have a *logos*—some sort of sufficient reason to exist. They can be considered in relation to the cosmic patterns or events that they can be responsible for, and their roles and activities could be tightly related to nature's vital ways. The mutation of mythological thinking towards philosophical thinking is exemplified in this characteristic expectation that the divine must help explain nature, not the other way around. This is a reversal to the pattern of mythological thinking, which selects out special natural phenomena to illustrate traditional tales or particular prophecies about the gods. This explanatory reversal culminated with the termination of philosophy's dependence on religious speculation. Orphic poetry and priestly oracles continued to disseminate mythic thought.

The early Greek philosophers were philosophical by relying far less on prophetic and mythic modes of imagination. They did not consider mystical experience as reliable information, they would not conform their explanations to narratives about miracles or afterlives, they were not systematizing or reforming a religious tradition, and they hardly took notice of religious dictums issuing from temples.[3] Furthermore, as later Greek thinkers next discerned, any religious tradition was open to criticism for failing to conform to a logical-natural system offering to explain the world and humanity. Atheology's doubt that religion possesses any knowledge of gods, its interest

in natural accounts to replace religious myths, its worry that devout piety conserves narrow prejudice, and its questioning of traditional religion's powers in society, was well underway.[4]

Because the Greeks were able to progressively redefine what it means to be divine, they could reconsider how the divine must fit with the natural world. Thinkers could blend the physical and the divine together, or reduce the divine to just the natural, or eliminate the divine entirely. Philosophy did not sharply break with theology at one jump in ancient Greece. An important intermediate stage was the way that Greek thinkers during those times understood how different nations relied on different pantheons, and a deity of one pantheon could be identified as the deity of another pantheon. What mattered was the functional nature of that deity's responsibilities, so only a single god for each important aspect of the world's ways is needed. During the seventh, sixth, and fifth centuries BCE, a few innovative cosmogonies were not just polytheistic, but "panpolytheistic": one single set of deities is reasonably needed to control the cosmos, although each nation bestowed different names upon them for their pantheon.

Early Greek thinkers had this form of panpolytheistic cosmogony available as a model as they became more philosophical. If a thinker's philosophy proposed a few supreme powers responsible for operating the cosmos, perhaps one of them could be Zeus by another name. Panpolytheistic cosmogony was just a step away from a physicalist cosmology open to assigning just the names of gods, and not the gods themselves, to the fundamental natural powers which do have good reason to be real. This manner of attaching names of deities to natural powers is not infrequently observed across Presocratic philosophies. However, it can be hard to tell from fragments of texts and testimony from later commentators whether a philosopher genuinely believes in the divinity of a cosmic power, or adopts a pose of piety to appear plausible and avoid persecution.[5]

Soon after this "panpolycosmism" appeared in Presocratic thought, other thinkers intrigued by the religions of many nations simply reversed the correlation discerned between gods and cosmic forces. They atheologically theorized that religions arose when people began to regard natural powers in the world as cosmic deities and gave them personifications and names. Speculations about the real supreme powers in the cosmos made a natural pairing with theories about how religions would have arisen in primitive efforts to account for natural phenomena of great significance. Once Greek thinkers began to imagine what practical purposes religions can serve, they began to perceive the many social and political functions religions perform, further treating religion as more of a human invention than a divine revelation. Nearly every Greek and Roman philosopher talked a great deal about gods, but great care must be taken to comprehend what each thinker is really trying to say about them. Only confusion erupts when a Greek or Roman philosopher using *theos* or *deus*/*divus* is understood to be necessarily talking about an unnatural sentient being, or gets misunderstood by

a later religion like Christianity as talking about a supernatural deity who created the world. Translating Greek ideas about a person's 'mind' or 'soul' must be similarly undertaken with caution.[6]

The earliest Greek philosophers from the sixth century BCE, such as the Milesian thinkers Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, offered philosophical cosmologies by selecting something fundamental that ultimately was responsible for the world, and claiming that it, and hence the world, has always self-sufficiently existed. Thales gained fame for predicting the solar eclipse of 585 BCE, and two of his cosmological ideas survived to puzzle later philosophers: "the world is made from water" and "everything is full of gods." Thales illustrates how to cosmologically blend the physical and the divine. He selected one element from the traditional list—earth, air, water, and fire—as the basic *phusis*, the source and substance of everything else, and credited this elemental water with divinity. That could explain his saying that everything is full of gods: if everything is ultimately made from divine waters, then everything is full of divinity. The notion that water was the original source of the world was a much older mythic idea found across the Middle East, including the influential civilizations of Babylonia and Egypt, and well-educated and well-traveled Greeks like Thales would have encountered it. That view of water's cosmic importance is echoed in Jewish scripture where Yahweh must divide primeval waters to make the heavens and the earth. Anaximines similarly selected elemental air for generative supremacy, and he apparently reduced *pneuma* (Greek for both breath and soul) to this elemental air.

Anaximander was by far the greatest thinker among the Milesians, and perhaps not philosophically equaled until Plato. He is the first Greek credited with composing a prose work titled *Peri Physeos*, About Nature. Almost nothing of it survives, but several later philosophers composed works by that same title, and they imitated Anaximander's ambitions: offer an account of the basic powers developing the world (a cosmology), describe the earth's general features and its relationship to heavenly bodies (an astronomy), and theorize about how the features of the earth and its life came to be (a geology and natural history). Anaximander selected a purely philosophical conception for the original source of everything, describing it as the 'unlimited' or 'boundless' (the *apeiron*). It has always existed, nothing else was its source, nothing contains it, it has no limiting traits, and it is indestructible. All specific elements and their combinations into things, along with the balanced forces controlling them, arise from the bountifulness of the *apeiron* which remains essentially within all things. Anaximander did not propose that either the *apeiron* or the produced cosmos had a beginning, or would someday end—the *apeiron* is eternally generative from its own boundless energies, rather than creating nature by plan or choice. This *apeiron* is entirely *phusis* rather than *theos*: it is not alive or sentient, it is not supernatural, and it must not be mistaken for something akin to Aristotle's prime mover or any sort of immanent deity. (Treating this *apeiron* as a deity,

simply due to its everlasting and unlimited productivity, or its role as the first principle or arche, is an anachronistic imposition upon Anaximander, who pre-dates thinking of a god in those ways. Attributing eighteenth-century pantheism or nineteenth-century panentheism to a thinker who lived 2,200 years before Spinoza is even less credible.) Furthermore, the elements and forces of nature are not gods, either. They operate by necessity on their own without assistance or guidance, and nothing divine ever gets generated from their activity. Anaximander therefore designed the first worldview atheology in the West, and the first "natural atheology" specifically. Only the nonreligious materialism of Ajita Kesakambali (India, sixth century BCE) shares that earliest priority in the history of intellectual thought.[7]

Later philosophers, including Aristotle, labeled these three Milesian philosophers as the *physiologoi*, the 'physicists', although modern scholars commonly call them 'physicalists' or 'materialists'.[8] The poet Xenophanes, also from the sixth century BCE and familiar with the Milesians, favored a supreme and changeless deity full of goodness invisibly filling the world (itself made of earth and water) with godly mental guidance. He did not explain this cosmological theory, but he did warn that knowledge of this one god may elude humanity, who rest content with their own invented images of gods: "If oxen and horses or lions had hands, and could paint with their hands, and produce works of art as men do, horses would paint the forms of the gods like horses, and oxen like oxen." In Xenophanes we see the first comprehensive atheology of Greece, although he did not commit to atheism. Only limited reasoning supports anything divine as ultimately real; the world's religions are ignorant about what the divine is probably like; religions reflect the preferences and prejudices of different nations; and religions about anthropomorphic gods harm society by inculcating poor moral ideals.[9]

Leucippus (active mid-fifth century BCE) and Democritus (c.460–370 BCE) were known as the atomists. They proposed two fundamental principles—one is solid as 'being' and the other is emptiness as 'void'—so that motion and rearrangement are possible and change is explicable. Tiny indivisible units of being (the 'atoms') travel through the void and have innumerable kinds of interactions and combinations with each other, to generate everything else of complexity and growth. Because the atoms and the void can never change in themselves, they are immortal and indestructible, and they cannot sense, think, or guide anything. Furthermore, since every particular thing is made of atoms, the changes and developments in the cosmos are not guided by any unnatural mind, but only the regular habits displayed by the cosmos over time (what we might now call natural laws). Living things owe their *psyche* and animation to the collective behaviors of atoms, and the intellect of mental thought is probably made of fiery spherical atoms, which can permeate throughout all other things and contribute to their animation. By completely reducing all reality including mind and thought to the unfeeling interactions of the elemental atoms, the atomists

effectively eliminate everything divine and providential from the cosmos, leaving only a natural philosophy and a worldview atheology. Having omitted gods from his philosophy, Democritus devised natural explanations for the development of humanity and society. A few fragments of his writings, as reported by later authors whose works did survive, express Democritus's scorn towards gullible people who ignorantly praise or blame fortune, or divine intervention, for the good and bad things that happen to them.[10]

Reducing everything in the cosmos to elements and forces was a widely influential idea, but other philosophers combined that view with their identification of special components or features of the cosmos as intelligent and divine. Empedocles (active c.450 BCE) agreed that only indestructible elements can really exist, but he discarded the void and preferred atoms made of the four elements—Fire, Air, Earth, and Water—which combine and re-combine in ceaseless and necessary cycles of attraction (Love) and conflict (Strife). Like Thales and Xenophanes, Empedocles expected supreme thought to be a special elemental power, occasionally labeled as the 'Sphere' (his gesture at the infinity of the cosmos), or in one passage as *theos*, responsible for lovingly guiding the cosmic order. Anaxagoras, a contemporary of Empedocles and Democritus, proposed that the elements are innumerable in kind and number. Special among them is the element of *nous* or 'mind' which can know everything, interpenetrate everywhere in the cosmos, and especially infuse living things. Besides its co-immortality with the cosmos and its responsibility for setting the world's elements into initial motion, this cosmic mentality is not assigned any other divine properties, it is not beneficial or providential, it does not control the material development of the world, it cannot prevent disorder or chaos, and nowhere does Anaxagoras call it divine or label it as a god.[11] However, his theory about this cosmic mind does bring together two crucial hypotheses that no philosophical predecessor had attempted: first, one component to the everlasting cosmos must completely infuse and impel it in order to fully explain the stable natural order; and second, that pervasive component must have the powers of a supreme mind. Previous philosophers (and mythic poets) of Greece had imagined that god(s) must dynamically intervene in the cosmos, but Anaxagoras assigned a single cosmic mind the weighty responsibility for pervading and influencing the cosmos. Because his view is no supernaturalism (the supreme mind is within the cosmos and the same everlasting age as the cosmos) or pantheism (most of the natural world is not composed of this mind), we may label it as 'pervatheism' because this supreme mind is intermixed with nature and immanent within nature, but not interfused or equivalent with all of nature. If this mind only bestowed upon the world its initial guidance, with physical causes explaining everything else occurring in the world, as Anaxagoras suggests, his philosophy approached 'deism'.

Anaxagoras took a distinctive place among his contemporaries for this unusual cosmology, but he was notorious in Athens for boldly impious views. He rejected popular Greek religion and denied that heavenly bodies

were gods, famously saying that the sun is just a red-hot mass of metal. If later reports about his reputation have some accuracy, he may have been threatened with prosecution for his outspoken impiety. He soon had good company.

Classical Greek Atheology

Skepticism towards popular religion could be heard from sophists and dramatists during the era of Socrates and Plato, although most of their writings are lost. Only a modest number of preserved fragments or reports from later commentators can suggest who may have engaged in atheological speculations. A handful of intellectuals such as Protagoras (c.490–420 BCE), Diagoras of Melos (c.480–405 BCE), Prodicus of Ceos (c.465–395 BCE), along with Socrates (469–399 BCE), were accused of impiety and disrespect towards gods. Setting aside imputations of godless atheism by ancient authors as too vague and biased to be reliable, only the evidence that atheological views were aired during that era should be considered.

It is recorded that Protagoras wrote a treatise titled "On the Gods" to say that nothing can be known of the gods, not even whether any exist. He reputedly offered an atheological argument to explain this skepticism about the gods: too many obstacles forbid knowledge either way, since the matter is too obscure and beyond a lifetime's quest, so no one has the intellectual capacity to ascertain a god's existence, or to even conceptually grasp what a god really is. As for Diagoras, the better-attested information about him indicates that he publicly denied the gods, perhaps under the influence of Democritus, and his disparagement of religion caused Athens to announce a reward for his murder. Prodicus was also skeptical towards all gods, and he offered an explanation for the human invention of religion: profound respect for humanity's benefactors, such as natural resources and heroic figures who established the useful arts such as agriculture. The fourth century BCE writer Euhemerus acquired his notoriety for proposing that societies invent religions by elevating to divinity the great inventors and discoverers of the past, long after their earthly lives are forgotten. Preserved texts cannot say whether Euhemerus thought that this explanation for the rise of various religions in turn shows that no one knows whether gods are real, but he was categorized by many later commentators as an atheist.[12]

Several works by the dramatist Euripides (c.480–406 BCE) convey impious sentiments and unconventionally anti-religious ideas. Other dramatists were equally capable of such provocations. Sextus Empiricus (a later skeptic, discussed below) in his book *Against the Physicists* recounts how a play by the author Critias included a character who announces atheism's denial of the gods, and Sextus provides some provocative lines of monologue from this play (no other portions survived). This Critias (c.465–403 BCE) was Plato's great-uncle, a close associate of Socrates (like several among Plato's family), and led the Thirty Tyrants who overthrew Athenian democracy in

404–403 BCE. (One later commentator credits Euripides instead, claiming that it was from one of his plays titled "Sisyphus.") Besides Sextus, other ancient writers also quote portions of this 42-line passage; this play was apparently regarded as highly significant at least until the second century CE for its brash atheological ideas.

Authorship will never be proven, but this play makes its atheological point clearly enough, even if neither Critias nor Euripides were atheists. The passage quoted by Sextus includes these notorious lines:

> Some shrewd man, wise in judgment, first
> Invented for mortals the fear of gods,
> To serve as terror for the bad, even though
> Their actions, words, or thoughts be secret.
> And then he brought in the Divinity,
> Saying there was a God, thriving in deathless life,
> Hearing and seeing with his mind, thinking much,
> Both mindful of this world and a bearer of divine
> Nature, who could hear all that mortals speak,
> And have the power to see their every act.

The rest of the passage recounts how people will be motivated to obey the laws out of fear of displeasing this non-existent god.[13] According to this monologue, false beliefs about nonexistent gods are promulgated to reduce uncivil behavior. As an account of how religious ideas arose, this passage's hypothesis is inadequate, despite its agreement with religion's defenders that religious belief can usefully reinforce morality and political stability. All the same, it does stand as the earliest preserved statement of atheism's frank unbelief through an atheological explanation for religion.

As for Socrates, he was not an atheist, but he did not uncritically accept the Greek gods either. In Plato's dialogues, Socrates reports that Anaxagoras persuaded him that 'mind' is an essential cosmic power radically unlike the material elements of the world. Plato went far beyond Anaxagoras, convinced that mind is uniquely powerful upon the cosmos, not only explaining why the cosmos has maintained its orderly regularities and beneficial features, but also why living things are designed to be animated and intelligent, and why humans can communicate with the divine to gain knowledge. Socrates and Plato, like several other philosophers and poets during their era, rejected popular notions of the gods as anthropomorphic and fickle deities desiring human worship and supplication. When Socrates was put on trial for impiety, as Plato's dialogue *Apology* described, Socrates recounts how his accusers say,

> . . . there is a man called Socrates, a wise man, a student of all things in the sky and below the earth, who makes the worse argument the stronger. Those who spread that rumor, gentlemen, are my dangerous accusers, for their hearers believe that those who study these things do not even believe in the gods.[14]

Perhaps this accusation was just about disbelief in the customary Greek gods. Socrates asks for confirmation that he is really regarded as someone who does not believe in gods at all, and he receives it: he is thought to be "completely godless" (τὸ παράπαν ἄθεος, at *Apology* 26c). Socrates could not admit to doubting the Greek gods during his trial, but there is no question that he had explored philosophical alternatives about the natural cosmos, and Socrates voices severe criticisms of the Greek gods in Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro*.[15]

An admirer of Socrates, Aristippus of Cyrene (born c.435 BCE), inspired the Cyrenaic school's skeptical approach to knowledge, and expounded its materialistic principle that the good life is the pursuit of human pleasures. One Cyrenaic philosopher, Theodorus "the Atheist" (born c.345 BCE) and his book *On the Gods* (nothing of it survived antiquity) acquired a lasting reputation for teaching atheism. He may have been banished from Athens. Diogenes Laertius reports in his *Lives* of the philosophers (third century CE) that Theodorus earned his reputation as an atheist, and suggests that Theodorus's book was substantial enough to mold Epicurus's views on gods.[16] Socrates left behind many protégés, but only in Plato's dialogues can we read surviving accounts of atheological views.

Plato (427–347 BCE) not only took a firm stand against hedonism and materialism in many of his dialogues, but he also was the first philosopher to present the unbeliever's position before arguing against it. Plato's late work *Laws* (c.350 BCE), Book 10, gives the unbeliever a voice, and a small role in a dialogue about belief in god. The problem of unbelief was one specific form of the general problem of impiety or irreverence (ἀσέβεια) discussed in *Laws*. The issue was not merely that some people do not believe that any gods exist—they are labeled as *atheoi* at *Laws* Book 12, 967a—but others suppose gods exist but care nothing for humanity, and still other people ignorantly try to manipulate gods through sacrifices and prayers for unjust ends. All three kinds of impiety are deemed to be dangerous, because these people deviate from the proper public worship of the community's gods, and hence a threat to sound morality and civic order. Plato is willing to explain why it is reasonable to judge that the gods exist. Perhaps more importantly, he recognizes the right of unbelievers to demand persuasive reasons for religious belief, just as citizens have the right to receive justifications for a state's laws. Plato puts these words in the mouth of one unbeliever in the gods:

> Now we demand, just as you demanded in regard to the laws, that before you direct harsh threats at us, you try to persuade and teach us that there are gods, adducing adequate evidence, and that they are too good to be turned aside . . .[17]

The literary presence of unbelievers in *Laws*, representing a small portion of Athenian society that Plato could not disregard as negligible, presents the

skeptical challenge to religion: the burden of proof is on those who teach about the gods, not the unbelievers. He not only accepts these atheists as legitimate voices in the public square, but he also accepts the burden of proof. Plato offers versions of the design argument, arguments for the soul, arguments for the virtues and justice of the gods, and arguments against the moral relativism associated with impiety. (His dialogue *Timaeus* provides Plato's extended theories about the creative responsibilities of the gods.) These Platonic arguments lead towards the judgment that a supremely mindful god, powerful but not physical, is responsible for shaping the cosmos and sustaining its order.

By placing this supreme god above and beyond all nature, and in some sense even prior to nature, Plato practically invented a monotheistic supernatural philosophy. He also arranged a direct confrontation for this supernaturalism with the first statement of opposition made by the atheist denial of all gods. Plato's manner of confronting atheists in *Laws* is not that impressive, unfortunately, since no atheist argument against the gods is discussed. In fact, across all of Plato's dialogues, the most atheological worldview of his era is never discussed: the atomistic materialism of Democritus. Plato makes sure to engage with, or at least mention, most every significant thinker of his age, but the name of Democritus nowhere appears, not even once. The biographer Diogenes Laertius reports (at *Lives* IX.40) that Plato wanted to destroy all copies of Democritus's writings. Plato's rivalry with Democritus is credible, because Plato combated the notion of mindless nature in many dialogues, and he regretted philosophy's responsibility for impiety. For Plato, philosophy must be responsible for the restoration of piety, but he realized how traditional myths no longer appealed to many educated thinkers. The solution cannot simply be about instilling poetic myths. If the finest poetic myths of Greece do not ensure the piety of clever but stubborn people, as Plato could observe, then correct understandings of divinity must perform that service.

That important distinction that Plato made between common mythic tales and reasoned views of god called for a new term, and Plato supplied it. The word *theologias* first appears in his earlier dialogue *The Republic* (at 379a), where Socrates is urging political supervision over the narrative patterns to religious poetry. Adeimantus then asks, "But what about this question of patterns for stories about the gods? What should those patterns be?" In Plato's Greek, this phrase for "stories about the gods" is *typoi peri theologias*, so they are not talking about mere stories (which Socrates had already said were not true), but deliberately revised accounts of gods according to selected standards. Socrates next supplies those standards: the true god is only good and beneficial, so the *theologias* should only consist of stories affirming those divine values. This work of 'theology', for the aims of *The Republic*, would hence consist of the civic reformation of all accounts about the divine. In Plato's *Laws*, reasonable accounts favoring the gods' existence (ἐπαμυνούντων λόγων ὡς εἰσὶν θεοί, at 891b) apply *logos* to divinity

so that gods have good reason to be real. This work of designing the 'theos-logos', as we might put it, must be different from the earlier Socratic '*theologias*', and that latter term is not applied in *Laws*. Evidently the *theologias* are not enough. Plato reveals why: Greek "wise men" (*to sophon*), such as Anaxagoras, can be offer persuasive views of natural roles for divinity, distracting young people away from pious stories of the gods and turning them into disbelievers (886b-888a). That explains why natural philosophers are accused of ἀθεότητας, *atheotetas*, meaning atheism. Plato's readers would immediately think of Socrates as well, but they should re-read the *Apology*. Socrates does not try to disprove the charge of atheism by endorsing anything in Homer or Hesiod, or any *theologias*, or anything like natural theology, perhaps because the trial jurors would not have been impressed. Socrates only brings up the least intellectual sources of piety: credulously believing temple oracles and following divine voices. Piety was pretty easy to display with common religious practices. What about impiety?

For Plato, there are two causes for a person's impiety—good character and bad character—behind all three manifestations of impiety (saying that gods do not exist, gods are aloof, or gods are pliable). People of good character may openly reject all religion for its (perceived) injustice, or they prefer aloof gods due to unreasonable arguments, or they might resort to divine supplications for their own benign goals. People of bad character deserve far harsher punishment. They may deny all gods, or say that the gods are aloof, in order to secretly promote divination, magic, and other unholy schemes and institutions to control peoples and cities. The third manifestation of bad character tries to profit from taking advantage of people's pieties and fears by promising to deal with the dead, predict the future, or negotiate with the gods (Laws 908b-909c). But Plato's own basic opinion of unbelief is that it typically springs from an evil and hubristic character. His dialogue *The Statesman* shares the same opinion about people led into atheism, where he uses the word *ἀθεότητα*, a form of *ἀθεότης*, *atheótēs* meaning atheism and godlessness (308e-309a). Regardless of the basis to their mental deficits, if the impious cannot reformed by proper *logos*, then they are irredeemable. Stubborn atheists especially deserve prison, where education and admonishment may change their minds, but after five years of imprisonment any remaining atheists should be put to death.[18]

However much Plato represented the common prejudice against atheism in his day, Greek philosophy did not swing into alignment. His student Aristotle (384–322 BCE) promptly undermined and replaced many Platonic principles about knowing truth, locating divine action, and explaining what the soul is and what it can do. Aristotle assigned blissfully contemplative gods to the guidance of celestial motions, but even these gods need assistance. He additionally argued that while the cosmos itself is eternal without any external creator required, a single ultimate source of all motion—a Prime Mover of the cosmos—intelligently directs the primary forces of the world from within the cosmos. Aristotle's metaphysics finds that the Prime Mover

does not have its own supernaturality or eternality, it takes no responsibility for benefiting the world, it has no interest in providentially guiding humanity, it has no partiality for some people over others, and it has no preference for some human deeds rather than other deeds. This disagreement between Plato and Aristotle over whether the god(s) designed the world for humanity's benefit, providentially guide human affairs, or directly commune with the intelligent soul, is an ample illustration of the theoretical limitations involved with appealing to gods to explain the world. Aristotle thought that orderly nature by itself produces the forms of living creatures, including humans, and he also expected human intelligence to be sufficient for ensuring that civic life can be orderly without divine authority or assistance.[19]

The dividing line for Aristotle between theology and philosophy is not whether an account of the world appeals to ideas about god(s), but whether any supreme being or power (divine or not) has a natural reason to exist. Aristotle's metaphysics of first philosophy therefore primarily deals with god as the first cause. The systems of Aristotle and Plato display how there are in fact four intellectual enterprises which can operate contemporaneously: mythic/poetic theologies; civic theologies defending the local gods for the public welfare; natural philosophies crediting gods with explanatory value (what we now call natural theology); and natural philosophies that do not use divinities (natural atheology, or what is now physical cosmology). It only remained for a religion like Christianity to add a category for revealed theology to separately deal with religious experiences. If there must be a wider category to include both mythic/poetic theology and natural theology to acknowledge their overlapping explanatory concerns, the term 'cosmogony' may serve.[20] There is also a natural affinity between civil theology and revealed theology, as they both seek to secure what is good for people; perhaps 'moral theology' is their common core.

At least Aristotle, unlike Plato and Christians, did not advocate persecution against atheists. A degree of toleration was settling into Greek philosophy, even as conquest and incorporation into the Roman Empire unsettled much else. The next centuries of Hellenic thought under Roman rule were dominated by skepticism.

Hellenistic Atheology

The philosophical schools established by Plato and Aristotle flourished for three centuries. Plato's Academy evolved towards the promotion of dialectics and skepticism towards knowledge. Aristotle's Lyceum promoted investigations into major fields such as physiology, biology, geology, and natural history. Strato of Lampsacus (c.335–270 BCE), the third leader of the Lyceum after Theophrastus, took the most nonreligious stance taught at either school. Strato abandoned divine providence and Aristotle's teleology while affirming a worldview atheology of dynamic materialism akin to Democritus's atomism, which was later called hylozoism. The smallest parts

of matter are minimally self-moving, but they are unfeeling and insentient, and everything else is composed of this basic substance. Strato denied any role for gods or any reality to an immortal soul.[21]

Besides these schools, a third century BCE school was inaugurated by Epicurus (c.341–271 BCE) in 306 BCE, and Zeno of Citium began teaching his stoicism in Athens around the same time. Both the Epicureans and the Stoics declared that gods exist, but they were not much like any religion's gods. A Stoic god was a cosmic mentality sustaining the order of the cosmos without providentially caring for humans in particular. Some fragments from Zeno and later Stoics seem to say that ultimate substance of the whole cosmos is god, suggesting a kind of pervatheism or pantheism. Epicurean 'gods' were deities in name only. The enigmatic figure of Pyrrho (c.360–270 BCE) was also active after Aristotle's death, although no writings survive and a school for Pyrrhonism had little life until three centuries later under Sextus Empiricus. Pyrrhonism offers a distinction between declining to believe anything about some philosophical matter (Pyrrho's recommendation) and affirming skeptical doubt towards all matters (not a Pyrrhonian tactic). Nuances about psychological attitudes cannot be explored here, so we may let suspending belief and remaining in doubt stand together in sharp opposition against philosophies willing to affirm metaphysical and theological theories.[22]

Epicurus revived atomism, designed a physical cosmology to explain the world, offered atheological arguments against common notions of the gods, and endorsed an atheist philosophy. Epicureanism denied that the gods created the cosmos (the gods instead exist within the self-sufficient cosmos). It denied that the gods are unnatural (the gods are made of atoms like everything else in the cosmos). It denied that the gods can have their own eternality (the gods are not older than the eternal cosmos, and they have a chronological age like the cosmos). It denied that the gods guide the cosmos (the gods do not set laws for motion or control material forces of nature). It denied that the gods care about humans (the gods are so blessed and blissful that they have no emotions and no interest in worldly affairs). It denied that any other sorts of spirits, angels, demons, or ghosts inhabit the world (those are just made-up stories to frighten the weak-minded). It denied that the gods created humans (disinterested gods would not bother, and nature has its own ways to create all life). It denied that humans have immortal souls (we decay and perish as our atoms disperse). It denied that the gods can provide any afterlife or reincarnation (there is no afterlife, material or immaterial, to possibly have). Finally, Epicureans denied that the gods communicate with humans (these aloof gods do not send signs and all revelations are spurious).

Epicurean materialists offered a natural atheology, the third after Anaximander and Democritus, and fulfilled a minimal atheism. Their so-called 'gods' are nothing but impersonal aloof beings, drifting out among the stars, which must be as material as everything else. (They might just be phantasmal

projections that devout people wish to see in sights or dreams, but the textual interpretation of Epicurus is unclear.) They are too irrelevant to the world or humanity to deserve our devotion, although people can somehow have impressive 'visions' of them, accounting for widespread ideas about gods. By denying divine creation of the world or humanity, denying divine unnaturality and eternality, denying divine providence or godly concern for worldly affairs, denying that gods have emotions or personalities, and denying unnatural spirits and immortal souls, Epicureans rejected the religions of their own times and just about any religion, for that matter. The material 'gods' can be admired for their blissful and immortal condition, but they should not be loved, appreciated, feared, appeased, worshipped, or supplicated, so there is no point to being superstitious or religious towards them.

Epicureans sought an ethical and peaceful life free from anxieties, hatreds, and fears—the placid condition of tranquility called ataraxia (ἀταραξία). They acordingly refused to believe in cosmic destiny, divine providence, godly decrees, heavenly portends, fortunate afterlives, or personal immortality. Against the Stoics, who perpetuated Platonic and Aristotelian theories about divine intelligences guiding the cosmos from within towards good ends, the Epicureans protested that even godly providence enslaved humanity to a fate beyond its control. In reply to that long-standing accusation against atomism that material causes take away human freedom, Epicurus declared that there is some freedom in the world because the future is not strictly determined: the motions of the atoms occasionally swerve by chance.

With nothing but material force behind us and unpredictable dissolution ahead of us, there is nothing to do but enjoy life's pleasures placidly and wisely, here and now. That is a thoroughly secular life. Epicurus himself denied that he was an atheist, but he apparently defined an atheist as someone who would not affirm his blessed deities. Leaving aside partisan definitions for atheism and piety, there's no question that Epicureanism continued to set a high standard for atheology. The "summa atheologica" of the classical world stood in this materialistic tradition: *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things) by the first century CE Roman philosopher, Lucretius. Lucretius translated the Epicurean philosophy into Latin terminology for his Roman readers, conveying the forceful advocacy of materialism and admiration for nature. Furthermore, he was thoroughly antagonistic against superstition, religion, and cultish practices. He reduced everything about religion to mundane levels and human dimensions with such impressive thoroughness that *De rerum natura* achieved a complete atheological worldview. The reduction of everything divine to entirely natural matters was fulfilled, and only the mere label of "divine" still attached to special material beings who need not care anything for the world, just like the fortunate humans who could liberate their minds from worldly concerns, including everything religious.[23]

Atomism had several strong challengers. The Academic skeptics in Athens, inheritors of Plato's academy, questioned what could be known yet they did not take skepticism as far as unbelieving atheism. Carneades (c.214–129

BCE) produced a fully skeptical atheism by raising severe doubts about the aloof Epicureans gods and the Stoic god who was supposedly alive, imperishable, and benevolent. His follower Clitomachus recorded many of his master's lectures (now lost) including *Concerning Atheism* (c.120 BCE), which may have been the first treatise devoted to explaining many atheological tactics alongside philosophical defenses of the divine. Carneades's compilation of atheists, which may have been part of his treatise on atheism, was a resource for later Hellenistic, Roman, and Christian writers needing convenient atheological targets. Despite these atheological investigations, most Academic skeptics, like the Stoics, generally found it plausible to accept the existence of higher intelligence(s) guiding the cosmos for greater ends. The philosophical consensus continued to agnostically doubt or categorically deny that these gods reside outside the cosmos, do what legends say, possess human personalities, send signs about their intentions, intervene in human affairs, reward or punish human deeds, care for human worship, or assist with immortality.[24]

Another prominent philosopher, Posidonius (c.135–51 BCE), adapted Stoicism back in the direction of Aristotle. He became the most broadly educated researcher and natural historian in the Greek language. He was the first known commentator on Plato's *Timaeus*, and wrote many books including one titled *On Gods*, of which only fragments and testimony survive. For Posidonius, the whole cosmos is infused by a supreme soul, composed of a fiery and airy material called *pneuma* that possesses traits expected of *psyche* so that it animates and directs the cosmos. Posidonius classified Epicurus as an atheist primarily for denying divine providence, and he forged a relationship between leading an ethical life and understanding the cosmic rationality. Later Stoics developed Posidonius's analogy between the sympathetic coordination of an organic body and the cosmic "body" of harmonious parts. The early Greek view of panpolycosmism was replaced in Stoicism with a monistic "polynomism" in which god's manifest operations in the world can be discriminated and assigned names by human convention. Popular polytheism (and the multiplicity of religious cults and superstitions) is thereby explained, as the result of ignorance about the singular cosmic god. No supernatural mind is required to explain the order within the cosmos, because the dynamic materials of the world are eternally co-adjusted and lawfully harmonized for endless generative and regenerative activity.[25]

Stoics usually could, and did, label the cosmos's dynamic harmonies as the world's collective mind or soul, but they prevaricated over whether to treat it as a unified or distributed sentience. If a Stoic spoke of god's activities in the singular as being providential or benevolent, that phrasing was convenient, akin to the way that a scientist of today could say that nature's laws permit life. Could this god be blamed for failing to prevent suffering because god personally knows about nature's inconveniences? The Stoics explored what later became known as "the problem of evil" and provided

sophisticated resolutions that would be constructed again by medieval Christian theologians, but no Stoic felt compelled to appeal to the supernatural. The cosmos's orderliness is still intrinsic to the cosmos, and no god from outside the cosmos is responsible for determining the kinds of lives that organic things can live. All forms of life are reliant on the cosmos's natural processes, and in that sense some respectful consideration would be appropriate from humanity. To emphasize that proper reverence needed for the virtuous life, some Stoics (such as Seneca) anthropomorphized god as a knowing mind capable of understanding human motives. However, all Stoics regarded everything mental and godly as aspects of the natural cosmos.

Roman Atheology

Stoicism had competition. The prominent voice of moderate Academic skepticism was the statesman and scholar Cicero (106–43 BCE). Many of the arguments by Carneades about god, alongside presentations of Stoic and Epicurean views, are repeated in Cicero's work *De natura deorum* (On the Nature of the Gods, composed in 45 BCE). The title displays the culmination of the Greek quest for relating the divine to the natural, effectively reducing the divine in the Latin language down to naturally comprehensible terms. Cicero's text presents a dialogue among rival philosophers which prominently includes several skeptical arguments justifying disbelief in the gods, along with some arguments explaining why atheists must be mistaken. Cicero initiates the conversation by clearly stating the crucial issue. It is one thing to ponder what the gods are like, but what really matters to the religious life is whether the gods take any interest in humanity. The course of Cicero's dialogue artfully exposes philosophical disagreements about the powers and responsibilities of the gods.[26] If the gods are supreme and in some sense unnatural, then they could be influential over the cosmos as well. And if the gods are influential, it may also be the case that the gods are providential, for providence depends on influence. Finally, if the gods are providential, then they could be preferential as well, so piety and obedience may bring divine rewards to followers. This logical order therefore displays four main levels:

> The gods are unnatural (imperishable and immortal in contrast to natural things). They are worthy of awe, for they are supreme above all else. Perhaps they are worthy of admiration, and their blissful freedom from cares may be imitated.
>
> The gods are influential (powerfully guiding the course of the cosmos). They are worthy of reverence, for their cosmic control permits nature to create us and provide our habitat. Perhaps they are worthy of philosophical and scientific study, like any energies of nature should be.
>
> The gods are providential (pursuing and achieving purposes for the world). They are worthy of piety, for they understand and promote the

> greatest moral goods. Perhaps their ends are worthy of conformity, so we should harmonize our lives and our social order with those ends.
>
> The gods are preferential (guiding and rewarding communities and individuals). They are worthy of devotion, for they chose to supervise and protect us. Perhaps signs or messages about their preferences, interventions, and commands can be understood, so we should submit to divine authority.

It is hazardous to guess at Cicero's own philosophical conception of god. He did not defend skepticism for its own sake, but he endorsed strict standards for knowledge of the nature of god, and much about Stoicism failed the reasonable tests applied in his writings. The safest judgment is that Cicero agreed with Stoicism that god's intellect maintains necessary order throughout the cosmos, but he was dubious towards special providence and divine partiality towards oracles, supplicants, and sacrifices. If philosophy must leave much about god in mystery, that left religion in the hands of civil theology, where Cicero expected virtuous public religion to support the republic's welfare.[27]

The gods of Epicureanism evidently confounded critics, who voice their stern queries in Cicero's dialogue. What is religious about such deities? Epicurean gods are supremely different from us and entirely indifferent to us, yet they are material in nature and they must suffer the same fate as the cosmos since they do nothing and control nothing. As Plato had already pointed out, and Cicero reiterates, unless the gods are at least influential and providential as well as supreme, there is little point to religious worship or prayer. Nature philosophers could study these passive 'gods' as best they can based on available evidence, but there is nothing particularly religious to be done about any knowledge gained. Nature philosophy could not help religion determine the greater goals of the gods, for there are none as far as anyone could tell, leaving only the inexorable and fated course of the entire cosmos itself. In particular, nature philosophy could not assist religion with its interests in divine signs or messages, so it disdains 'superstitious' beliefs about miracles, omens, augury, divination, astrology, lesser spirits or demons, magic, sacrifice, and the like, and nature philosophy must also reject people claiming to have divine, occult, oracular, or prophetic powers.

As far as natural philosophy can tell, there several primary options. The complete denial of all gods would be one option. Alternatively, natural philosophy could try to establish one or more modes of divinity, such as cosmic aloofness, or some degree of divine responsibility from operating the cosmos down to directly communing with people. However, natural philosophy by itself could not settle on any consensus, as displayed the ongoing controversies familiar to Cicero. Theology had an important job to do: it must defend what nature philosophy by itself cannot. The idea that there are two kinds of truth, one kind for everything demonstrable by reason, and another kind for dogmas eliciting assent when reason hesitates, arose within philosophy

long before Christian theologians appeared on the Roman scene. Philosophy was still essential for building plausible arguments to bridge gaps between divine unnaturality and divine influence (e.g., the cosmos requires supreme forces to exist), between influence and providence (e.g., cosmic design implies divinely mindful control), and between providence and preference (e.g., special events are best interpreted as divine interventions and communications).

Theology can also construct its arguments defending religion in reverse order, from the public utility of religion to divine providence, and then to discerning godly responsibility. A prominent example is provided by Cicero's friend, Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE). Following Cicero's distinctions among types of theology, which imitated older Greek schemas, Varro distinguished three ways to classify theology: natural theology (*theologia naturalis*), mythical theology (*theologia fabulosa*), and civil theology (*theologia civilis*). One of Rome's most accomplished scholars, Varro was philosophically inclined towards Stoicism and traditionalism. He defended the preservation of Roman cults, temples, and rituals in his *Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum* (c.50 BCE) by appealing to civil theology. Religion should be controlled by the republic because civilian religiosity is crucial for stable society, and anything of such public magnitude is an appropriate area for government management and promotion. Submission to the republic therefore includes pious conformity with the official religion, so that religion's views about divine preferences and interventions are authoritative, along with relevant theological views about divine providence (and hence divine influence and divine unnaturality as well). As for the other two types of theology, according to Varro, mythical theology encompasses the useless superstitions and poetic dramas that are unworthy of good citizenship, while natural theology inquiries about what can be known of divine matters through good evidence and sound reasoning. From natural theology's sharp-eyed perspective, there is no intrinsic difference between the gods of mythical and civil theology (save for political approval), so the philosophers should stay strictly academic in their dangerous speculations.[28]

Respect for civil religion working for prosperous societies, and disrespect for degrading superstitions and cults, easily transfers over to a respect for naturalistic civil atheology. That smooth transition is illustrated in the examples of the next great Roman thinkers, Seneca the Younger and Pliny the Elder, a Stoic philosopher and a natural historian.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 BCE–65 CE) offers a thoroughly skeptical and naturalistic atheology towards superstitions, traditional religions, and popular cults, including the established civic religion of Rome. A more comprehensive atheological critique would not be heard in the West until the early 1700s in the freethought tracts of Anthony Collins and John Toland, who absorbed several features of Stoicism's worldview. Seneca exemplified the rationalistic agenda to Stoicism almost to the point of attaining

a fully naturalistic atheology. He affirms rational necessity to everything nature/god does, denies personal features such as willfulness or concern for human affairs, and allows for providence only in the minimal sense that nature is arranged for life's rational goodness. What Seneca and Roman intellectuals allegedly thought about religion, as intimated by later authors with their own agendas, has been the source of misleading quotations. Let us hear from Seneca himself about god, from *De Beneficiis* (On Benefits, c. 62 CE), Book 4:

> What else is nature but god and the divine reason which permeates the whole world and all its parts? . . . If you call this same entity "Fate" as well, you will not be misrepresenting the facts, for, since fate is nothing else than a chain of connected causes, he is the first cause of all, the one on which all the other causes depend. . . . Wherever you turn, there you will see him coming to meet you; nothing is empty of him, he pervades all his works. Therefore it is pointless for you, most ungrateful of mortals, to say that you owe a debt not to god but to nature, since there is no nature without god, or god without nature: they are identical, though they differ in function.[29]

Seneca does not offer a fully materialistic pantheism, because he retains a vestige of mentality to nature's all-pervasive harmony, and he urges people to discipline their minds towards a spiritual and virtuous harmonization with that cosmic mentality. As for worshipping the manifestations of god as personified deities, popular and cultic religion receives Seneca's censure and scorn. Some of his scathing observations are provided by Augustine in *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos* (The City of God against the Pagans, c.412), who supplies quotations by Seneca from a book on superstition which Augustine could access (no copy of it survived). In the course of interrogating Varro's leniency towards traditional Roman religion, Augustine compares Seneca's disdain towards all religion with Varro's dismissal of only poetic and dramatic myths:

> But the freedom that Varro lacked when he did not dare openly to condemn the civil theology in the way that he did in the similar case of the theatrical was not lacking—or, at least not entirely so—in Annaeus Seneca, who, as we learn from not a few sources, flourished in the time of our apostles. For in the book that he composed against superstitions he condemns the civil and urban theology much more copiously and vehemently than Varro does the theatrical and mythical.[30]

Augustine could see no good reason why myths about gods presented in the theaters are false but the same gods praised in temples must be revered, so Varro seems inconsistent. Seneca's position on religion is worse because it is hypocritical: a good citizen will conform to civil religion in public while

denying all religion (except for Stoic cosmology) in private. Augustine delivers his verdict against Seneca by convicting him with his own words:

> But if we attend to the truth of the matter, temples in which such rites are performed in reality are worse than theatres in which they are feigned. And so, as regards these rites of the civil theology, Seneca would rather see the wise man adopt the course of excluding them from his private religion while feigning respect for them in his actions. For he says: 'The wise man will observe all these things as commanded by the laws, but not as pleasing to the gods.' . . . 'let us also remember that their worship is more a matter of formality than of reality'. . . . On this view, therefore, neither law nor custom established anything in the civil theology which either pleased the gods or pertained to reality. But though Seneca was, as it were, made free by philosophy, yet, because he was a distinguished senator of the Roman people, he nonetheless worshipped what he condemned, did what he deplored, and adored what he blamed.[31]

This perspective on Seneca's duplicity still sounds fair today, perhaps because it seems so familiar. Plenty of modern thinkers have also composed unorthodox philosophies while complacently attending churches. Freethinkers across the spectrum from deism, unitarianism, and pantheism to agnosticism, naturalism, and deterministic materialism may be irreligious in one sense yet conformists with civil religion in another sense. Only a minority subset of dissenters urge their fellow citizens to empty their minds of religion in voting booths or to leave behind empty pews in churches. What is typical for that broad freethought spectrum is an argument against religion from religious proclivity: because societies around the world imagine their gods in so many different ways, there is no knowledge of what god truly is and no way to figure out which religion is more correct about god. That religious skepticism not only counters the *consensus gentium* (universal consent) argument for god's existence, but it also excuses all unbelieving consent, since no one can be faulted for doubting that any religion, especially the local religion of one's society, is right about god. This *dissensus gentium* argument against religious truth, along with just enough god-belief to avoid atheism, was heard loud and clear by readers of Pliny.

Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) included a superficial survey of many cultures in Book 7 of his encyclopedic multi-volume treatise titled *Naturalis Historia* (Natural History, c.77 CE). Amidst the fables, prodigies, and nonsense that Pliny repeats from his dubious sources, some genuine anthropological information about humanity is supplied. In the course of relating religious practices found in different societies, he dismisses beliefs about immaterial souls and afterlives as childish and vain notions, and he mentions how great inventors have been elevated to godly status. Book 2 assembles a cosmological depiction of the world as Rome of his time understood it, and Pliny lists the philosophers he consults, notably Anaximander, the Pythagoreans,

Democritus, Aristotle, and Posidonius. As an educated Roman of vaguely Stoic inclinations, he has no difficulty starting off his treatise with what he regards as a consensus from natural philosophy:

> The world, and this expanse—whatever other name men are pleased to call the sky that covers the universe with its vault—are properly held to be a deity, everlasting, boundless, an entity without a beginning and one that will never end. Men are not concerned to explore what is extraterrestrial, nor can the human mind make a guess about such things. The world is sacred, eternal, boundless, self-contained, or, one should say, complete in itself, finite yet resembling the infinite, of all things certain yet resembling the uncertain, embracing in its grasp all things without and within. The world is the work of Nature and, at the same time, the embodiment of Nature herself.[32]

The Greek quest to discover the nature of the gods has been fulfilled in this placid and rational Roman philosophy: there are no attributes assigned to divinity which do not belong to nature as a whole. Nature is worthy of everything regarded as sacred, from its self-sufficient eternality and endless infinity to its all-embracing power. If there is a god, Pliny adds, it would be a "complete embodiment" of soul and mind, but he also says, "I think it a sign of human weakness to try to find out the shape and form of God." He proceeds to explain all the different religions as imaginative ways for people to worship whatever they happen to most need, and he bitterly complains about immoralities and criminalities due to religion and superstitions about gods caring for worldly affairs.[33]

Cicero's manner of elucidating key issues concerning the gods and religion was soon matched by a similar classification. The prominent Stoic philosopher Epictetus (c.50–130 CE) provided his own delineation of the core atheological questions about the gods. As recorded by his student Arrian, the *Discourses of Epictetus* (c.108 CE) feature a discussion of religion in Book 1, Chapter 12 "On Contentment":

> Concerning gods there are some who say that the divine does not so much as exist; and others, that it exists, indeed, but is inactive and indifferent, and takes forethought for nothing; and a third set, that it exists and takes forethought, though only for great and heavenly things and in no case for terrestrial things; and a fourth set, that it also takes forethought for things terrestrial and the affairs of men, but only in a general way, and not for the individual in particular; and a fifth set, to which Odysseus and Socrates belonged, who say "Nor when I move am I concealed from thee."[34]

Epictetus does not discriminate between the influential and providential modes of divinity, but he includes an additional type of divine

action: special godly preference for certain individuals in the form of direct inspiration (such as Socrates' *daimonion*, spiritual intuition, or illumination).[35]

Philosophical speculation about religion in the classical world was soon joined by another school advocating severe skepticism, when Pyrrhonean skepticism was reorganized and advanced by Sextus Empiricus (c.160–210 CE). Sextus included a section "On Gods" in *Against the Physicists* (book IX of *Adversus mathematicos*) which discusses various hypotheses about the human origins for fanciful ideas about gods. Another section on "Do Gods Exist?" (that Sisyphus passage has its source here), skeptically argues that nothing can be known about gods. Intriguingly, Sextus not only identifies notorious atheists such as Euhemerus, Democritus, Diagoras of Melos, Prodicus of Ceos, and Theodorus, but he adds that there are many others without naming them. Sextus's treatise *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book 3, section 3, presents another brief but incisive atheology of arguments against the Dogmatists, those claiming to know about the gods. He exposes the many problems involved with attempting to conceptualize a god, judging if a god makes an impression on anyone, and inferring the existence of god from evidence. He also raises the problem of evil, casting doubt on divine providence and the moral worthiness of gods. Despite the resulting skeptical stance in accordance with reason, Sextus allows for conformity to customary religious attitudes. He adopts skeptical agnosticism without also urging irreligion, taking the position that one can share common opinions about the gods and display civil piety without any further concern about whether the truth can be known about the gods.[36]

For an all-too-brief period, the Roman world could also hear critical irreverence towards religion. The brilliant rhetorician and satirist Lucian (c.125–185 CE) took frequent opportunity in his stories and dialogues, such as *Dialogues of the Gods*, to poke fun at superstitious gullibility about myths and miracles. He gave no sign of being religious; posterity understood him as a renegade thinker unwilling to follow any school and a cynical atheist unimpressed by pious credulity. As a moralist, Lucian sides with common sense and plain virtue, detesting the hypocrisy and self-righteousness that accompanies religion. After his re-discovery in Europe during the Renaissance, his literary excellence was applauded and imitated, but his atheism was deplored.[37]

Lucian had skeptical company before the Roman Empire's demise. The neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry (234–c.305 CE) wrote extensive polemics against the Christian gospels, but only fragments survived as *Against the Christians*.[38] But special Christian vengeance was reserved for Emperor Julian, the Apostate (331–363 CE). Julian was no atheist, determined to impose a blend of pagan neoplatonism on the Empire for his theocratic glory. He detested the Christians, regarding their cult as a threat to his vision for civil order. Julian's treatise against Christianity was also eradicated, with only fragments surviving as *Against the Galileans*.[39]

Atheology and Early Christian Theology

Christian theologians during the third and fourth centuries began assembling thoughtful apologetics, borrowing and applying philosophy and natural theology. Their reactions against 'pagan' religion and natural philosophy were similarly developed through that Greek and Roman heritage. They had access to ample resources for organizing their intellectual positions.

Athanasius (c.300–373) displays the practices of sound atheology in his *Contra Gentes* (Against the Heathen) concerning the gods of Egypt, Greece, and other lands. He complains about the immoralities and injustices of all these gods, arguing that their fickle conduct and anthropomorphic characters implies that no genuine knowledge of such divinities is possible, Even worse, the way that pagan religions cannot agree about who or what should be worshipped shows that none of them know the true god. To defend the Christian god, he appeals to versions of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic arguments about the rational soul, the existence of only one god, and the harmonious design of nature. Christian monotheism also relied on extraordinary experiences occurring to people—encountering a divine being, witnessing miracles, reading gospel testimony, enjoying visions, transforming spiritually from within, and so forth.[40]

Four primary types of theology emerged during the period of the early Church down to Augustine: numinal theology, natural theology, moral theology, and civil theology. Christianity's reliance on 'numinous' experiences (borrowing Rudolf Otto's term to cover mystical and revelatory encounters) acknowledges the awesome and humbling awareness of god's supremacy. Natural theology was incorporated by early Church theologians from arguments crafted by Greek and Roman philosophers. Moral theology deals with divine providence and the moral worthiness of the god(s). Civil theology was bolstered by Greeks and Roman justifications for civil religion.

> Numinal theology asks and answers the question, Are gods needed to explain the encounters that people have with the numinous?
>
> Natural theology asks and answers the question, Are gods needed to explain the order and course of the cosmos?
>
> Moral theology asks and answers the question, Are gods needed to ensure a natural and human orientation towards goodness?
>
> Civil theology asks and answers the question, Are gods needed to encourage society to conform to civil order?

These four types of theology are recognized and expanded in form, if not always by name, across the subsequent history of Christian thought. Against each kind of theology, an atheological strategy has denied that

gods are required. Skeptical atheology doubts miracles and revelations and doubts mysterious gods. Worldview atheology finds natural explanations more reasonable than inscrutable divine deeds. Moral atheology judges that conformity to morality is improved by ignoring godly commands and threats. Civil atheology recommends that humanity's expertise with constructing republics can render public religion useless for politics.

These four atheological methods are just as effective when targeted against a particular religion's deities in order to promote one's own god. As both Greek and Roman thought amply illustrates, philosophical argumentation can assist theology no less than atheology. If the gods have a nature, and humanity naturally looks to gods for guidance, then philosophical theology should seek the best understanding of what the god(s) are truly like. Many of the early Church theologians borrowed heavily from philosophical speculation and argumentation over gods. It was not just a pagan industry anymore. The four Gospels and Paul's letters used some scholarly Greek concepts to increase Christianity's plausibility among educated gentiles. Using philosophical tools, Church Fathers tried to consolidate Christian dogma despite entanglements with environing influences such as Neoplatonism, syncretic gnosticisms, and rival religions flourishing across the late Empire. Those efforts produced a mass of doctrine by the end of the fourth century that lacked a unified understanding of crucial matters: revelation and Biblical interpretation, God's monotheistic supremacy over creation, the moral duties attached to faith in Jesus, and the relationship between a Christian and government authority.

Augustine of Hippo and his greatest work, *The City of God against the Pagans*, plunged into those controversies with the ostensible aim of resolving issues of civil theology. The initial books of this treatise mostly consist of Augustine's erudite application of philosophical atheology against Roman religion and its gods. The Roman scholars exhibited as his debating partners—primarily Cicero, Seneca, and Varro—were not merely great scholars, as Augustine made sure to point out, but they themselves criticized much about religion and Roman deities. Augustine does not label his pagan sources as *atheos*. When Augustine labels something as ungodly, his Latin language provides two adjectives for being impious and irreligious, *impietas* and *inreligiositas*, and he can also make the accusation of *infideles* for being an infidel by denying the true God. Since Cicero, Seneca, and Varro supply fair arguments against Roman ideas about gods, Augustine only had to paraphrase or quote from their writings, showing how he also had a keen eye for effective atheology. Furthermore, he was doubly effective through atheology, by examining their affirmative views of the god(s) in order to raise atheological problems against them: logical inconsistencies among Roman ideas of their god(s); inconclusive evidence available for determining their nature; their unsuitability as moral exemplars; and their ineffective protection of Rome from disasters and upheavals. Then, moving to an even higher level of atheological expertise, Augustine offers sensible explanations for pagan god-beliefs—credulous susceptibility to weak inferences, dubious

virtues, popular tradition, and so on—of the sort that can be read in popular books by atheists discounting all religions.[41]

Finally, with a display of atheological acumen unprecedented in the early Church, Augustine lays down what can be affirmed about his God by denying that God's attributes can be ascertained by inferential reasonings of the sort that natural philosophy and pagan natural theology rely upon. This innovative version of *via negativa* is not merely the denial that ordinary adjectives fail to adequately characterize God, although that is the argumentative destination. In the initial books of *The City of God*, Augustine crafts precise affirmations about God in order to situate them beyond the reach of all counter-reasoning. If logical inconsistencies rule out a supreme deity, Augustine's theology prevents the possibility of logical inconsistency. If nature's ways at most implicate a cosmic deity no more endless than nature itself, Augustine's theology prevents the cosmos from having a status equivalent to God's. If differences over values and virtues are mirrored in capricious godly conduct, Augustine's theology prevents the one true morality from having any human origin or basis. If different civic religions suit different types of polities, Augustine's theology prevents a Christian's political duties from outranking one's duties to God. Augustine's overall strategy become more apparent by Book 7, after allowing his pagan experts every opportunity to account for their gods:

> But when I consider the naturalistic explanations by which learned and acute men endeavor to turn these human affairs into things divine, I see nothing except what can be attributed to temporal and earthly works, and to corporeal beings, invisible, perhaps, but still subject to change, and these are in no way the true God.[42]

God becomes truly super-natural in Augustine's hands, as 'nature' is defined as the realm of temporal change in order to clearly distinguish God as non-temporal (eternal) and unchanging (immaterial).

Instead of just 'apophatic' theology, Augustine also conducts what may be labeled as 'apological' theology (from ἐπίλογος, reasoning), which is a kind of intellectual apologetics designed to evade the judgments of philosophical reasoning about the nature of God. God is essentially unlike nature. The way that nothing supernatural, on Augustine's terms, can be assuredly inferred from anything about the natural world is precisely the point of apological theology: there is no reasonable basis for denying Augustine's supernatural truths. If there was some sort of god that could be reasonably inferred from natural evidence, that explanatory deity would be too similar to nature itself. Even assigning to a god the role of being the "soul of the world" or the supreme force of the cosmos still reduces that deity down to nature's scale. God created nature *ex nihilo*, so nature is not the only reality and its energies are entirely dependent on God. To guarantee an absolute explanatory gap between God and creation, Augustine asserted that God is absolutely simple (God has no parts or aspects which might be inconsistent

with each other) and he rejected metaphysical principles for explaining how creation happened (God has no mediating relations with creation which might diminish God to something quasi-natural).

Over against all Greek thought back to the Presocratics, apological theology denies that God has a nature to be discerned by discursive thinking. God has its own reality, of course, and speculative reasonings may approach God (Augustine admired Plato, for example), but the truth about God can certainly not be contradicted by any inferences from philosophical argumentation. For Augustine, revelation supplies knowledge of God where reasoning would not. Apological theology is not 'illogical' or 'irrational' theology. On the contrary, apological theology does not deviate from logic, but only erects a demarcation line showing where our human reliance on thoughtful inference falls short of attaining explanatory knowledge of God.

It might seem as if Augustine's foundations in revelation and apological theology permanently insulate God from atheology, but that is not the case. Augustine's God is conceived in relation to atheological strategies, so the most sophisticated atheological methods can still examine and critique this supernatural God. Later chapters explain how to apply atheological methods to even the most unnatural and mysterious supernaturalisms.

After Augustine, disputes over doctrinal matters not so easily settled by apophatic or apological theology continued to disrupt the Church. Debates over the metaphysical status and attributes of God and Jesus were conducted with logical tools in philosophical terms. Forging creedal agreements over divine perfections, trinitarianism, and Jesus's divine-human status, for example, relied on Greek and Roman concepts such as 'logos', 'physis', 'ousia', 'hypostasis', 'natura', 'substantia', and 'persona'. During the fourth and fifth centuries, tensions grew between the Latin-speaking and Greek-speaking bishops, foreshadowing the later schism between the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches. The Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) re-affirmed trinitarianism and promptly lost a major center of Christian thought in the Middle East, at Alexandria in Egypt, to a dramatic schism. Alexandria's insistence upon unified natures for Jesus and Yahweh, emphasizing the 'mono' in 'monotheism', played a role in the Near Eastern conversion to Islam's austere monotheism two centuries later. Muslim scholars enjoyed access to Greek and Roman thought for many centuries while Europe languished in relatively isolated orthodoxy.[43]

Despite philosophy's immense contributions to Christian theology, no one forgot its hazards. Philosophers agreeable towards the usefulness of god(s) were also quite capable of freethought and dissent from any religious views they deemed incompatible with reasonable evidence, sound natural philosophy, appropriate moral standards, and a just civic order. Reaching orthodoxy required philosophy, yet philosophical thinking is little help for maintaining orthodoxy.

Christian emperor Justinian the Great, weary of interminable theological controversies, ordered that all philosophy academies must be permanently closed in AD 529. The orthodoxies of faith were advancing, and Europe's lights were fading out. The few philosophers who were left could look back upon eleven centuries of speculative thought about *phusis/natura* and *theos/deus*. Among the atheologians of that long time period, some retaining religious traditions and others doubting all religion, these figures stand out in their respective categories:

Skeptical atheology: Protagoras, Carneades, Sextus Empiricus

Worldview atheology: Anaximander, Democritus, Strato, Epicurus, Lucretius

Moral atheology: Euripides, Socrates, Lucian

Civil atheology: Prodicus, Euhemerus, Varro, Pliny

An additional category should be set alongside these four, for thinkers who credit supreme power(s) with divinity, although their worldviews supply a comprehensive atheology appealing to skepticism, morality, and civics to strongly doubt popular religion. The primary thinkers in this category, who produced comprehensive atheologies without eliminating gods from their worldviews, are:

Atheologies vs. religion: Xenophanes, Empedocles, Plato, Aristotle, Posidonius, Epictetus

All the atheologians listed here, from Anaximander to Epictetus, placed in serious doubt the existence of gods of the sort that religious people worship, even if some of these thinker's philosophies did not rule out deities entirely.

Justinian's decree came too late. The indebtedness of theology to philosophy and atheology was irresistible and irrevocable, and the future of religion in the Near East and Europe was permanently transformed.

Notes

1 See Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos* (2003); and Montanari et al., ed., *Brill's Companion to Hesiod* (2009).
2 Consult Rihll, *Greek Science* (1999); Irby-Massie and Keyser, *Greek Science of the Hellenistic Era: A Sourcebook* (2002); and Graham, *Science Before Socrates: Parmenides, Anaxagoras, and the New Astronomy* (2013).
3 Surveys and translations of Presocratic philosophy include: Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, ed., *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History With a Selection of Texts* (1983); Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy, vol. 1: The Presocratics* (1993); Curd and Graham, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic*

Philosophy (2008); and McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates: An Introduction With Texts and Commentary* (2010).

4 See Drachmann, *Atheism in Pagan Antiquity* (1922); Thrower, *The Alternative Tradition: A Study of Unbelief in the Ancient World* (1980); Bremmer, "Atheism in Antiquity" (2007); Sedley, "From the Presocratics to the Hellentisic Age" (2013); and Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (2015). On the demarcation between proto-scientific and scientific modes of explanation, consult Shook, "Abduction, Complex Inferences, and Emergent Heuristics of Scientific Inquiry" (2016).

5 See Wiebe, "Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Greece," in Wiebe, *The Irony of Theology and the Nature of Religious Thought* (1991), chap. 3; Vlastos, "Theology and Philosophy in Early Greek Thought" (1993); Henrichs, "What Is a Greek God?" (2010); Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy From the Presocratics to Plato* (2000); Buxton, ed., *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought* (1999); Wians, ed., *Logos and Muthos: Philosophical Essays in Greek Literature* (2009); and Mikalson, *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy* (2010).

6 See Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (1987); Frede and Reis, ed., *Body and Soul in Ancient Philosophy* (2009); and Nightingale and Sedley, ed., *Ancient Models of Mind: Studies in Human and Divine Rationality* (2010).

7 Matson, "The Naturalism of Anaximander" (1953), and Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology* (1994). Also consult Naddaf et al., *Anaximander in Context: New Studies in the Origins of Greek Philosophy* (2003); Graham, *Explaining the Cosmos: The Ionian Tradition of Scientific Philosophy* (2009); Gregory, *Anaximander: A Re-Assessment* (2016).

8 On ancient physicalism and naturalism, consult Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature* (2005); Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature* (2006); and Vamvacas, *The Founders of Western Thought—the Presocratics: A Diachronic Parallelism Between Presocratic Thought and Philosophy and the Natural Sciences* (2009).

9 See Lesher, *Xenophanes of Colophon: Fragments: A Text and Translation With Commentary* (1992), and Warren, "Gods and Men in Xenophanes" (2013).

10 On Democritus, see Taylor, *The Atomists, Leucippus and Democritus: Fragments, a Text and Translation With a Commentary* (1999); Cartledge, *Democritus* (1998); and Brancacci and Morel, ed., *Democritus: Science, the Arts, and the Care of the Soul* (2007).

11 For Empedocles, consult *The Poem of Empedocles* (2001). On Anaxagoras, see *Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, Fragments and Testimonia* (2007), and Marmodoro, *Everything in Everything: Anaxagoras's Metaphysics* (2017).

12 See Zilioli, *Protagoras and the Challenge of Relativism: Plato's Subtlest Enemy* (2012), and van Ophuijsen et al., ed., *Protagoras of Abdera: The Man, His Measure* (2013). On Diagoras and his intellectual context, see Janko, "Socrates the Freethinker" (2009); and Winiarczyk, *Diagoras of Melos: A Contribution to the History of Ancient Atheism* (2016). On Prodicus, see *Prodicus the Sophist: Texts, Translations, and Commentary* (2011). On Euhemerus, see Winiarczyk, *The "Sacred History" of Euhemerus of Messene* (2013). See also Roubekas, *An Ancient Theory of Religion: Euhemerism From Antiquity to the Present* (2016).

13 Sextus Empiricus, *Selections From the Major Writings on Scepticism, Man, & God* (1985), p. 189. The true author won't be conclusively identified, although scholarly consensus presently leans towards Critias. Consult Runia, "Atheists in Aëtius: Text, Translation and Comments on 'De Placitis' 1.7.1–10" (1996); Kahn, "Greek Religion and Philosophy in the Sisyphus Fragment" (1997); and Whitmarsh, "Atheistic Aesthetics: The Sisyphus Fragment, Poetics and the Creativity of Drama" (2014). On recent efforts to relate god-belief to maintaining

civic order, see Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict* (2013), and a special issue of articles discussing this book in the journal *Religion, Brain and Behavior* (November 2015).

14 *Apology* 18b-c, Grube's translation in Plato, *Complete Works* (1997).

15 See Smith and Woodruff, *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy* (2000), and Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (1989). See also Selbey, "The Atheist Underground" (2013).

16 Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (1925), Book 2. On Theodorus, see Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism: The Cyrenaic Philosophers and Pleasure as a Way of Life* (2015), and Zilioli, *The Cyrenaics* (2014).

17 Plato, *Laws* (1988), Book 10, 885c-d, p. 281.

18 Plato, *Laws* (1988), Book 10, 909a, p. 309. See the commentary by Mayhew in Plato, *Laws 10* (2008).

19 On the gods of Plato and Aristotle, the reader can consult Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the Timaeus-Critias* (2004); Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (2005), chap. 6; and Menn, "Aristotle's Theology" (2012).

20 See Gregory, *Ancient Greek Cosmogony* (2007). See also Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity* (2007).

21 See Desclos and Fortenbaugh, *Strato of Lampsacus: Text, Translation, and Discussion* (2011).

22 See Bett, *Pyrrho, His Antecedents, and His Legacy* (2000); Kuzminski, *Pyrrhonism: How the Ancient Greeks Reinvented Buddhism* (2008); and Machuca, ed., *New Essays on Ancient Pyrrhonism* (2011).

23 On Epicurus, see *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia* (1994), and Konstan, "Epicurus on the Gods" (2011). On Lucretius, see *On the Nature of Things* (2001); Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (1998); Gale, ed., *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Lucretius* (2007); Gillespie and Hardie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (2007); and Colman, *Lucretius as Theorist of Political Life* (2012).

24 On Academic skepticism, see Thorsrud, "Arcesilaus and Carneades" (2010), and Hankinson, *The Sceptics* (1995). See also Groarke, *Greek Scepticism: Anti-Realist Trends in Ancient Thought* (1990).

25 On Posidonius and Stoicism, see Kidd, ed., *Posidonius* (1988–99); Inwood and Gerson, ed., *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia* (2008); and Salles, ed., *God and Cosmos in Stoicism* (2009). Also consult Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (1986); Algra, "Stoic Theology" (2003), and van Nuffelen, *Rethinking the Gods: Philosophical Readings of Religion in the Post-Hellenistic Period* (2011).

26 On Cicero's civic and religious views, see Wood, *Cicero's Social and Political Thought* (1991).

27 Colish, *The Stoic Tradition From Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (1990); Woolf, *Cicero: The Philosophy of a Roman Sceptic* (2015).

28 See Jocelyn, "Varro's *Antiquitates rerum diuinarum* and Religious Affairs in the late Roman Republic" (1982–83); Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews and Christians* (1987); and Ando, *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire* (2008).

29 Seneca, *On Benefits* (2011), 89–90. Consult Setaioli, "Physics III: Theology" (2014).

30 Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (1998), p. 261.

31 Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (1998), pp. 263–264. See O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (1999), and Rüpke, *Religious Deviance in the Roman World: Superstition or Individuality?* (2016).

32 Pliny, *Natural History* (1991), p. 10.

33 Pliny, *Natural History* (1991), pp. 12–14. See also Pliny, *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal: Natural History, Book 7* (2005), sect. 188–191 (pp. 100–101),

and Healy, *Pliny the Elder on Science and Technology* (1999).

34 Epictetus, *The Discourses as Reported by Arrian, the Manual, and Fragments, Books I–II* (1925), pp. 90–91.

35 On Epictetus and theology see Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (2002), chap. 6. See also Long, *Stoic Studies* (1996).

36 On Sextus Empiricus, see Thorsrud, "Sextus Empiricus on Skeptical Piety" (2011); Bailey, *Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonean Scepticism* (2002); and Long, "Skepticism About Gods" (2006). Also consult Burnyeat, ed., *The Skeptical Tradition* (1983), and Barnes, *The Toils of Scepticism* (1990).

37 See Robinson, *Lucian and His Influence in Europe* (1979), and Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins: Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance* (1998).

38 Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians* (2005).

39 Hoffmann, *Julian's Against the Galileans* (2004); Smith, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate* (1995).

40 On Athanasius see *Contra Gentes* (1892). Also published in Athanasius, *Contra Gentes: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (1984). See Edwards et al., ed., *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (1999).

41 Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures c.360–430* (2007).

42 Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (1998), p. 301.

43 Consult Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (1991); Edwards et al., ed., *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (1999); Chilton and Neusner, *The Intellectual Foundations of Christian and Jewish Discourse: The Philosophy of Religious Argument* (2002); Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions* (2003); Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (2004); Humphries, *Early Christianity* (2006); Edwards, "Early Christianity and Philosophy" (2009); and Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (2013).

6 European Atheologies

European thought, both theological or atheological, inherited Greek and Roman methods and conclusions concerning arguments for the existence of god(s), divine providence, and godly intervention. Just as Plato formulated his type of supernaturalism while minding the atheological vocabulary and views of earlier Presocratic philosophers, many early Christian thinkers formulated their views of Yahweh-and-Christ divinity with due cognizance of atheological disputations from pagan philosophers. However, as the study of philosophy diminished in the late Empire, theology began to neglect its deep intellectual heritage.

Soon after the final collapse of the Roman Empire, it was practically impossible to learn about any intellectual worldview other than Christian theology anywhere from Spain to Persia. Most of the vast output of Greek and Roman literature, science, and philosophy did not survive after Rome fell and Christianity rose. What was not destroyed as pagan heresy was simply neglected, allowed to burn or rot instead of recopied for preservation across the centuries. If a work contained philosophical, scientific, and naturalistic ideas, it was more likely to perish. When one notes how the works of a single author (the physician Galen) comprise over a third of all scientific writings retained from Greece and Rome, the realization must dawn that Christians cared almost nothing for science and philosophy. The Latin world knew little of Plato and Aristotle and almost nothing of lesser figures, and the Greek Byzantine realm was only moderately better informed.

After Emperor Justinian banned the teaching of philosophy in 529, the entire West went under the complete domination of a religion intent upon the monopolistic control over access to education. There was soon little left to teach anyone. By the late 500s, waves of tribal conquerors had swept throughout Italy and surrounding regions, further depopulating the cities and destroying civic infrastructure. The great Roman libraries in southern and western Europe were either completely destroyed, largely dispersed, or irretrievably buried. The ability to read Greek anywhere in Europe practically vanished, and classical Latin was almost forgotten. The small Church hierarchy sharply reduced its facility with classical learning until only a few

theologians read any of it, and archives for writings by Patristic theologians were sparsely furnished.

Then the intellectual climate became much worse.

Medieval Theology and Atheology

Pope Gregory I "The Great," modestly educated in Latin before ascending to the Holy See in 590, made known his disdain for anything classical and the least secular. No one could teach him Greek in Rome, and he did not bother to acquire good Greek while temporarily residing in Byzantium. From his seat in Rome as the Pope, he surveyed a militarized remnant of a city numbering perhaps 50,000 residents. He had a sparse papal library, and he had no school to teach correct Latin.

Pope Gregory was not worried. He scorned the need for proper Latin, and found no use for Greek because he thought that no one should be reading pagan authors. Only basic Latin grammar for priests, sufficient to read the Vulgate Bible along with thin psalters and missals, was really required. Similarly vulgar Latin let laypeople read devotionals and stories of the saints. Only somewhat better Latin was needed by the theological hierarchy to read the Church fathers and compose more commentaries. The course of history determined that Gregory had to be the first medieval pope, yet Gregory is responsible for launching that "Dark Age" reputation for proud ignorance. By the time of his death in 604, copying any surviving classical works had slowed to a crawl, and nothing of the liberal arts beyond minimal grammar and a little math and logic was still taught with any regularity across Europe. The seventh century, among all the centuries of literacy in the West before and since, had the fewest number of authors compose anything. Gregory's own commentary on Job was not exceeded in length by any writer until the Venerable Bede in England over a century later.

Advanced learning did not revive until Charlemagne's renaissance in France of the late eighth century. At the same time, most of Europe was adrift in genuine darkness. The expectation that priests could at least read Latin was lowered. By the ninth century, many ordinary priests along with almost all of their parish inhabitants were illiterate, and only in larger cities could the literacy rate rise a little above 1 percent. The ability to read was tightly correlated with holding clerical and orthodox status. The way that authorities long regarded heresy and illiteracy as essentially linked shows how the Bible itself was the dividing line between orthodox education on the one side and dangerous ignorance on the other.[1]

Medieval Christianity during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries revived much learning. That period relied on philosophy and atheology for its theological understanding of supernatural monotheism so heavily that arguments for god's reality and responsibilities were more philosophical than theological. Theology can develop rapidly in the intellectual context

of available atheology, as the example of ancient Greek thinkers shows, followed by the example of Early Church Fathers.[2]

The early Church theologians before and shortly after the fall of the Roman Empire could read and engage with living atheologians among their contemporaries. Christian thought regarded the assertion that nature is self-sufficient, self-organized, and eternal, along with the denial of divine providence, as the bases to atheism. The development of what became Catholic orthodoxy would be unintelligible without considering the dialectical relationship, as fruitful as it was antagonistic, between theology and pagan philosophy. However, one partner in that dialogue was silenced after Rome fell. Within a century, the only atheology in the West was whatever had survived in writing. Roman Catholic theology, along with Byzantine, Jewish, and Islamic theology during that period, refuted the unbeliever *in abstentia* by countering atheist positions with arguments for god's existence. Atheology did not receive much attention in the Byzantine world, as other metaphysical heresies consumed more intellectual energy. Seeking freethought or atheology in medieval Islamic theology or medieval Jewish theology, much less locating the rare atheist, has its own characteristic obstacles. Only after the construction of philosophical worldviews was fully underway in Europe during the Late Middle Ages, thanks to the revival of ancient learning and scientific originality, could atheology be fully revived there.[3]

Science before Galileo had much in common with theology, if only for the reason that any science independent from theology was vigorously suppressed. The polymath and proto-scientist Roger Bacon (c.1214–c.1294) had suggested in his later writings such as *Communia naturalium* (c.1269) that natural matter had its own potencies, and for that interest in natural matters along with doctrinal disputes, he was repeatedly condemned by Church authorities and his writings were forbidden. Jean Buridan (c.1295–1363) used the concept of impetus to explain why an object, once it had acquired a motion in a direction, would continue to move that way unless something else impeded it. Buridan understood that he was departing from Aristotle, but fortunately for him, he had avoided joining a religious order and becoming a theologian, and he died before charges of heresy were leveled. His writings were prohibited a century later, when another period of theological orthodoxy suppressed nominalist and mechanistic speculation, so progress in physics was delayed for two more centuries until Galileo.

Buridan was not the first Christian philosopher to contemplate a physics of impetus. Between Aristotle and Buridan, there stood John Philoponus during the sixth century, who proposed a version of impetus and opposed Aristotle on additional grounds. Yet Philoponus could not inaugurate a school of experimental philosophy, and his scientific reasonings not were taken seriously until seven centuries later. He had converted to Christianity, became entangled with metaphysical debates over Neoplatonism and the Trinity, found his challenges to Aristotle unappreciated, died a lonely figure, and received the posthumous condemnation of 'heretic' a century

later. Philoponus therefore stood as an ominous warning to Christians for many centuries thereafter.[4] If Christianity was responsible for science in the West, it exercised that oversight with devastating neglect and suppression for a thousand years.[5]

This chapter selectively exhibits primary themes to the recovery, development, and flourishing of philosophical atheology in Europe. It must not be mistaken for anything like a full account of atheology's complex intellectual history.

Worldview Atheology

While theologians were suppressing heretical innovations during the Middle Ages, one among them would transform the intellectual landscape. Thomas Aquinas (c.1224–1274) absorbed and transformed whatever he could access from Plato and Aristotle, the Church Fathers, Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna, c.980–1037) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126–1198), the Academic skeptics, Cicero's compositions, and late Hellenistic atheology. Due to that intellectual heritage, Aquinas acquired significant expertise with atheology as well as theology, standing as a towering atheological expert between Sextus Empiricus a thousand years before him and Thomas Hobbes four hundred years after him.

Aquinas applied several atheological strategies to argue against pagan gods and reject rival monotheisms too dissimilar to Christianity's god. As for that one true God, this god can at best be described by analogy, knowledge of god is not innate or self-evident, and god's essential nature cannot be known by the natural reason possessed by humanity. For Aquinas, denying God's reality is thinkable and intelligible. All the same, atheism is mistaken, and his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (c.1265) and *Summa Theologiae* (1274) attempt to demonstrate the reasonableness of God's existence and uniqueness by overcoming many atheological objections. Like Augustine, Aquinas relies on apophatic and apological theology to ensure that God remains incomparable to creation.

Despite Aquinas's astonishing example, very few theologians during the following centuries were able to liberally grant the ability of a philosophically-minded atheist to have any reasonable doubt about god's existence. Even a pagan philosopher's god, the first cause according to Aristotle, was viewed with deep suspicion. Some Aristotelian arguments relied on requiring regular causes for all events and practically reducing god to just the essential source of nature's organized activity. Those views could lend credit to cosmological worldviews closer to pantheism or Stoicism. In 1277 the Church at Paris condemned as heretically dangerous many philosophical ideas supporting natural atheology and denying immortality, free will, and divine providence, including proposals that the world is eternal and self-sufficient, necessity governs everything, and the soul cannot separate from the body. Theology gradually accommodated some suitably modified Aristotelian theses after Aquinas's canonization to sainthood in 1323.[6]

The revival of atheology during the Renaissance was an era when the Greeks and Romans were read with fresh eyes less beholden to orthodox theology. The complete text of Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* was re-discovered in 1417 so knowledge of Epicurus began to circulate, and Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods* also circulated more widely. Natural histories by Varro and Pliny were accessible. Greek editions by and about ancient philosophers grew in number. Latin translations also became more available, including an expanding availability in Latin of Plato and Aristotle. By the early and mid-1500s, Greek and Latin editions of additional ancient works containing robust atheological arguments, such as Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, (pseudo-)Plutarch's *De Placitis Philosophorum*, Plutarch's *Moralia*, Epictetus's *Enchiridion*, and Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* were published across Europe, with Italian, French, and English translations soon following.[7]

Atheism was both thinkable and accessible during the Renaissance. Historians grew accustomed to referring to a "myth" of atheism in the Renaissance, but atheology amounted to far more than just was published by professed atheists. Heresy required much disguise, sufficient to allow ample discussion of worldviews quite different from Christian supernaturalism across Europe by mid-1500s, including worldviews leaving little for a supernatural deity to do.[8]

Epicureanism was already promulgated during the mid-1400s by the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla (c.1406–1457), who composed a dialogue titled *De voluptate* (1431, with later versions titled *De vero bono* and variant titles) featuring a Stoic, an Epicurean, and a Christian. Its atheological exposition of Epicurean naturalism has no parallel in the fifteenth century. The Epicurean character's section is much larger than the others, *voluptas* (pleasure) is upheld as the true good, and natural reason and proper education are sufficient for virtuous conduct. The book's Christian character duly adds that devout piety is necessary for the immortal soul's proper destiny. Valla's other writings never omit such piety, so the extent of his sympathies with atheism cannot be determined. The safest judgment treats his original Christian humanism (and its diminished role for theology) as an aspect of the broader transition into eclectic Renaissance creativity.[9]

The university in Padua (where Petrarch had lived) near Venice became a prominent center during the fifteenth century for not just innovative science and medicine but also unorthodox natural philosophy and stirrings of atheology. Alumni included astronomer Nicholas Copernicus and physician William Harvey, and Galileo taught mathematics for many years at Padua. Another professor, Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525), was an eclectic Aristotelian who admitted divine beings in the heavens, while defending skepticism towards supernaturalism, divine providence, the soul's immortality, free will, the efficacy of prayer, miracles, and any sort of magic and superstition. His treatise *De naturalium effectuum causis sive de incantationibus* (On the Causes of Natural Effects or On Incantations, 1520) was only published long after his death. Perhaps the most notable figure produced by

Padua's education is Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94). His proclivity for syncretism brought together Christian dogmas about Jesus, Jewish mysticism, mixtures of magic and theurgy, blends of Plato and Aristotle, Islamic theology, and non-Christian spiritualisms. This eclectic mixture was supposedly about the Christian god, and he thought that Biblical interpretation would prove it. Every religion and philosophy has the same divine wisdom shining through it, everyone has the freedom and opportunity to perfect their souls, and the faithful can only truly know god in mystical union. He was viewed as heretical, and forbidden from debating or publishing more of his metaphysical ideas. A graduate of Padua, Gerolamo Cardano (1501–76), held some highly unorthodox, atheological, and superstitious views that brought accusations of heresy, including the idea that the cosmos was eternal and uncreated. Another student from Padua was Francesco Vimercati (c.1512–c.1580), who taught Greek and Latin philosophy at the University of Paris and then at a university near Turin in Italy. Vimercati attracted little attention for heretical views, but when he died, he left a manuscript titled *De principiis rerum naturalium* (On the Principles of Natural Things, 1596) which unifies god and nature, credits the material world with eternality, and denies immortality. The most prominent professor at Padua during the beginning of the sixteenth century, Cesare Cremonini (1550–1631), scrupulously adhered to Aristotle and Averroes to the point of concluding that reason confirms materialism while denying that god is personal and the soul is immortal.[10]

One of the earliest treatises to use the term *atheos* independently from translating ancient philosophers, which also was the first published work displaying a cognate of 'atheist' on the title page, appeared in Latin in 1552: Guillaume Postel's *Liber de causis seu de principiis & originibus naturæ utriusque. . . . Contra Atheos et huius larvae Babylonicae alumnos, qui suae fauent impietati ex magnorum Authorum perversione*. Postel, an Italian Catholic, regarded denying divine providence or dissenting from the Catholic Church as signs of atheism. He was mainly interested in slandering reformers such as Rabelais, Aristotelians, and Calvinists. A generation later, another defender of true religion also put 'atheists' on a title page of a book. Philippe de Mornay, a French Protestant and a drafter of the Edict of Nantes, published *De la verité de la religion chrestienne: contre les athées, épicuriens, payens, juifs, mahumedistes, et autres infidêles* (The Truth of the Christian Religion: Against the Atheists, Epicureans, Pagans, Jews, Mohammedans, and other Infidels, 1581). De Mornay duly lists a few atheists by reputation—Diagoras, Theodorus, and Euhemerus—but he mainly fulminates against the denial of providence by Epicureanism. Postel and de Mornay have little in common except their common concern for defending providential supernaturalism against the idea that the cosmos runs its own course without godly guidance. They had no contemporary intellectual to criticize, so the anonymous speculative atheist had to serve.[11]

A profound thinker soon emerged to attract the attention of atheist hunters. Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) was murdered by the Church for repeated heresy. Bruno denied being an atheist, but his worldview incorporates many atheological theses. Among his many works, *De l'Infinito, Universo e Mondi* (On the Infinite Universe and Worlds, 1584) clearly doubts that a supernatural deity has good reason to exist, so this book stands as the first philosophical work of atheology published by a European non-theist. His philosophical system resembles Anaximander's cosmology: an infinite and eternal cosmos ultimately made of a dynamic primary substance which is manifested in opposite qualities (hot and cool bodies) throughout the cosmos. Bruno added that the bright bodies (suns) everywhere in the cosmos would have their own cool bodies (planets) just as our sun has its own planets. As Bruno dismissed Aristotelianism and endorsed Copernican heliocentrism, the apparently unlimited dimensions of the universe staggered him as it did for Nicholas of Cusa (and Stoics and Epicureans before them both), but Bruno's logical thinking tried to measure the vast implications. This infinity of worlds across the infinity of space must require no divine creator, necessarily stays in constant regular motion by itself, and no providential guidance or divine intervention ever happens.

Bruno's subsequent books during the 1580s and 1590s can only be read as anti-Christian and anti-religious. For example, Christ is accorded a place among the dying mythic gods, and any deeds by an actual Jesus that seemed miraculous to onlookers were due to natural causes. With his next great work, *De Immenso et Innumerabilis* (1591), the materialistic atomism of earlier works receives further elaboration. Atoms are finite and tiny, yet imbued with a bit of that ultimate power inherent to the infinite cosmos. That ultimate power possesses a sentience and 'soul' akin to the way that Stoicism expected one lawful harmony to prevail throughout the world, but its 'soul' is distributed throughout all bodies rather than having some distinctive status. Bruno sometimes sounds like a pantheist in praise of the infinite, and his system does not meet the minimum criterion for atheism, but if he intended this inconceivably immense world-soul to be a genuine deity, he deprived it of any special godly location, powers, personality, or responsibility, leaving his vaguely pantheistic worldview where he intended it, fairly close to Lucretius.[12]

The next work of atheology published by a European dared to openly approve of pantheism and world-soul naturalism and risked the imputation of atheism. *De admirandis naturae reginae deaeque mortalium arcanis* (On the admirable secrets of nature, queen and goddess of all mortal things, 1616) was authored by Lucilio Vanini (1585–1619) in Paris under the name "Julii Cæsaris Vanini." After becoming a priest around 1606, Vanini was attracted to the University of Padua, where he accessed Aristotelian and pantheistic ideas and the work of Pomponazzi and Cardano. He abandoned the life of a monk and wrote increasingly heretical tracts, culminating in *De*

admirandis naturae, which was composed in the form of dialogues. As the voice of J. C., Vanini expounds the arguments of atheists including Diagoras, Protagoras, and Epicurus, and recounts naturalistic views of Aristotle, Stoics, and Averroes. He explains the basis to skepticism towards revelation, miracles, divine creation, and immortality; he offers theories of civil atheology about the invention of gods by prophets such as Moses and Muhammad; and he offers naturalistic accounts of mundane and marvelous features of the world. Although J. C. says that atheists are wrong about God, their accounts usually sound more reasonable than scripture or supernaturalism, and philosophy is typically deciding matters. A passage from the fourth dialogue illustrates Vanini's adherence to nature's self-sufficiency:

> J. C. If I had not been brought up in the schools of Christians, I should have said that the heaven is a living being, because it is moved by its own form, which is living. Certainly Aristotle called the movement of the heaven a living motion; asserting that it is an animal which is moved by an eternal motor. Some refuse, from Aristotle's words, to recognize a rational soul in this celestial animal, because Aristotle thus defined it—the act of an organic body, the potentiality of what possesses life. But this definition is suitable to the celestial animal, so is, therefore, the thing defined.
>
> Alexander. But what do you think?
>
> J. C. There is matter in the heavens.
>
> Alexander. So I think.
>
> J. C. And therefore form.
>
> Alexander. That I also grant.
>
> J. C. This form is not brutal, it inheres in elements of a certain kind.
>
> Alexander. That I do not deny.
>
> J. C. Neither is this form Intelligence, for that by no means pertains to matter. Therefore it is life or soul, and hence produces motion. Intelligence, therefore, does not cause the motion of the heavens, unless we affirm absurdly that it has two movers.[13]

Vanini was convicted of atheism and burned at the stake in Toulouse in 1619. His thought never passed into obscurity. Later atheologians borrowed and quoted from Vanini almost as much as theologians did.

The dialogue format also allows theism to have the last word. Thomas Campanella (1568–1639) included a debate between a worldly skeptic and a Christian philosopher in a book composed during 1606–07 but published many years later. His book was titled *Atheismus Triumphatus, seu Reductio ad religionem per scientiarum veritates* (Atheism Conquered, Rome 1631, Paris 1636). The atheism to be defeated thinks that religions are numerous and mutually contradictory because they are the invention of devious manipulators interested in the political domination of credulous peoples. Machiavelli's heresies plays a large role for Campanella. Although

the skeptical, moral, and civic views of atheology are allowed to make an appearance, the philosophical replies are far lengthier and more substantial. Most of his book expounds the natural reasonableness of divine providence, revelation, immortality, noble virtues, and related doctrines for a universal religion.

Compilers of radical heresy and outright atheism began to add Europeans to the traditional list of Greeks and Romans. The prime suspects by the 1620s and 1630s were Renaissance Italians: Machiavelli, Mirandola, Cardano, Bruno, and Vanini. For example, Filippo Fabbri's *Adversus impios atheos disputationes quatuor philosophicae* (1627) rounded up the usual pagan suspects and adds Machiavelli and Mirandola in due course. Anonymous authors were, of course, very difficult to identify before their death. The irreverent, heretical, and atheism-friendly *Cymbalum Mundi* (1537, probably by Bonaventure des Périers) was scandalous yet fascinating for subsequent generations. Another rationalist and satirical work evocative of Lucian was the *Dialogues* of Jacques Tahureau, published posthumously in 1556.[14]

The first compendium of thorough atheism in Europe, anonymously composed in Latin sometime during the 1600s, was titled *Theophrastus Redivivus*. (A book on a different topic with the same title was published in 1659.) This manuscript was never published and its few copies did not circulate widely, so it made no detectible impact on the intellectual world. By recounting and quoting an array of ancient philosophers, it assembled facets of skeptical, natural, moral, and civil atheology. Like a handful of other clandestine writings openly or secretly circulating in Europe at that time, this tome's general theme depicts philosophers as thinkers able to rise above popular religiosity and theological fabrications. Philosophy can perceive religion for what it really is: a human-made tool of oppression preying upon fear and superstition. An example of a widely circulated clandestine book—about materialism, pantheism, and deism—is the multi-volume *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy*, published in Italian, French and English editions during 1684–97.[15]

Some atheological works reached a public audience only by accident. Kazimierz Łyszczyński (1634–89), an aristocrat philosopher, privately composed a treatise titled *De non existentia Dei* (The Non-existence of God) during the 1670s and 1680s. After its discovery by his enemies, this work, apparently the first atheological treatise in Poland, earned Łyszczyński the charge of blasphemy and prompt execution by local Catholic authorities.[16]

The rare appearance of defiant unbelief such as these tomes fooled no one about the underground vitality of what would become labeled as "libertine" and "free thought" speculations by *esprit forts* or free thinkers. However, any skeptics and materialists openly defying scripture and theology under their own names almost invariably ensured that their writings somewhere affirm that god exists. For their part, theological defenders of god quite regularly reassured readers that some arguments for god's existence cannot

possibly fail, even when considered by fully reasonable people skeptical about them. Treatise after treatise from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century, numbering into the hundreds, all declared that the "speculative," "intellectual," or "systematic" atheist in the flesh was an impossibility. The motivations behind this fervent and paranoid declaration are not hard to figure out: the author who would publicly talk about the best arguments potentially leaving doubt in a rational mind is the same author practically admitting that those arguments do not prove god's existence. That admission, implicitly made in print, is something that censors and inquisitors were looking for. Not only would such an author be expressly encouraging actual atheists to confidently deny the power of those arguments, but that author becomes a suspected atheist too, because the admission that other rational minds can doubt something is nothing other than an admission that one's own mind has already fallen into doubt. Even the tactic of presenting arguments for god and matching them with equally strong counterarguments was usually enough to deliver the charge of atheism. The only safe alternative is to confidently declare that the best arguments are irrefutable and unchallengeable, and cannot be doubted by any rational mind. Hence, actual rational atheists cannot exist. Explaining actual people who deny god and providence is simplified: they suffer from irrationality or ignorance; a mental or emotional disorder; or perhaps sinful pride and depravity; and so on.

And yet there was Hobbes. Like his near-contemporaries Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and René Descartes (1596–1650), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) represents the Renaissance's transition towards Modern thought. The greatest atheologian of the seventeenth century, Hobbes designed a reasoned worldview, detailed in *Leviathan* (1651), so comprehensive that religion gets relegated to popular fantasy by his materialist, skeptical, moral, and civil system of thought. His attitude towards religion is both tolerant and condescending. No religion can be wrong for expressing honorific feelings about mystery in various ways, yet no religion is right about the true nature of reality or about crediting god for moral guidance. For Hobbes, as for Epicurus, letting some feature of nature be treated as divine by the ignorant is a convenient way to account for near-universal religious sentiments. His philosophical system was about as close to Epicureanism as warranted by the best science of his day. He admired Galileo (1564–1642) and accepted Galileo's atomistic views (but Hobbes rejected voids between bodies). All the same, Hobbes denied being an atheist and denied advocating atheism. He regarded an atheist as someone who not only disbelieves god's existence but also disrupts public worship and disturbs civil authorities.

Hobbes's *Leviathan* nevertheless earned the charge of atheism because its worldview asserts that nature consists only of material bodies moving deterministically without unnatural impulse or immaterial guidance, and he skeptically doubts anything attributed to the ultimate causal power (that first cause called 'god') other than its infinite and unlimited character. Because

Hobbes held that the notion of incorporeality is meaningless, and 'spiritual' only means 'invisible', his spiritual god must be corporeal to be effectively real. His philosophy forbids attributing any sentience, purpose, will, or foresight to the ultimate cause, unlike classical Stoicism, and Hobbes's ultimate cause is even less like a god than Aristotle's prime mover or Stoicism's world soul. Hobbes repudiated pantheism, but that rejection did not resort to prevalent arguments that matter's passive essence or nature's organization indicate that a spiritual agent supplied motion and form to the world, because his philosophy did not rely on notions of essence, substance, and form, or on explanations involving final causes. Instead, an argument from semantics serves to contradict pantheism in *Leviathan*: since 'nature' and 'nature's cause' are distinct, the idea that "nature is all" is equivalent to both "nature has no cause" (which is unreasonable) and "god does not exist" (which contradicts the point of pantheism).[17]

Hobbes's natural atheology coincides with his natural theology. Theology cannot challenge philosophy and cannot be a source of any additional knowledge about god. His philosophy skeptically rejected the dualistic metaphysics and providential ethos of Christianity, leaving no rational justification for an immaterial soul, immortality, divine intervention, miracles, angels, or demons. What is treated as a supernatural revelation is just a vision or voice (etc.) that seems inexplicable to its recipient. What religious people find comforting or motivating is another matter, and civil religion can encourage the sorts of metaphorical ascriptions to god that promote honoring god and respecting civil authority.[18]

How could a scholar so learned in Biblical interpretation, agreeable with many of its ethical precepts, and comfortable with intimate church-state relationships, be an atheist?[19] Hobbes required a single form of worship for the public good, and condemned any public challenges to the established clerical class backed by government authority. However, he gave an atheological definition of religion: "Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, religion; not allowed, superstition. And when the power imagined is truly such as we imagine, true religion."[20] Since Hobbes's philosophy reduced god to an insentient corporeal power, the only true religion would be his own, which is to say, no religion about a genuine deity. Like Swift, Hobbes understood the public atheist to be a dangerously unsound freethinker, yet Hobbes was no theist either. Like Bacon, who was unprepared to eliminate religion, he was nevertheless convinced that the future of knowledge lay with the new experimental sciences represented by Galileo. Hobbes offered the first comprehensive atheological system in Europe and approached the highest standards of complete atheology.

Only the University of Paris scientist and philosopher Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) approximated Hobbes's empiricism and materialism during this era, practically to the point of philosophically denying god. In his book titled *Animadversiones in decimum librum Diogenis Laertii* (1649), which Hobbes carefully studied, Gassendi applied ancient skepticism while trying to reconcile

scientific empiricism with Epicurean atomism. His last book was *Syntagma philosophiae Epicuri cum refutationibus dogmatum quae contra fidem christianam ab eo asserta sunt* (Philosophical Treatise, 1649), which included the hylozoic suggestion that atoms are inherently dynamic, capable of motion on their own even if no external force is applied. To stop short of completing a natural atheology, he denied that the world's atoms are uncreated and eternal, awarding to god the responsibility of initially creating nature. With that singular ad hoc provision, pronouncements of devout Catholic piety, and leaving his *Philosophical Treatise* to be published after his death, Gassendi avoided persecution. Another philosopher in the free-thinking circle that included Hobbes was Margaret Cavendish, whose *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655) also proposed that atoms have inherent motion. She additionally suggested that atoms possess their own dim sensibility, offering an unusual hylozoic panpsychism. Like Gassendi, she depicted these naturalistic views as speculations compatible with a supernatural creator.[21]

Guillaume Lamy (1644–83), also at the University of Paris, exemplified the philosophical power of Epicurean natural atheology after it is disentangled from supernaturalism. He extended the scientific principles of Gassendi to every controversial topic from the infinity of worlds to the essential role of chance. Not since Giordano Bruno had a European expressly affirmed the self-sufficiency of nature. In his writings, especially *De Principiis rerum* (1669) and *Explication méchanique et physique des fonctions de l'âme sensitive* (Mechanical and Physical Explanations of the Functions of the Sensitive Soul, 1677), Lamy held that the world's atomic bodies possess inherent motion and they explain the creation of all natural bodies, including human bodies and their nervous systems, which in turn generate the mind. Lamy surpassed Bruno by refusing any assistance from the Aristotelian and Stoic themes of teleology and pantheism. Like Gassendi, Lamy avoided censure by proclaiming his faith in Christianity as a theological matter distinct from natural philosophy. Another French physician, Abraham Gaultier (1650–1720), followed these medical speculations with his own materialistic arguments that the soul is the product of the complex organic body in *Réponse en forme de dissertation à un théologien qui demande ce que veulent dire les sceptiques qui cherchent la vérité* (1714). Because Gaultier was unabashedly atheological in his rejection of dualism, stated in this work's subtitle as "life and death are the same thing," his atheistic declamations circulated in condensed manuscript form as *Parité de la vie et de la mort* (The Parity of Life and Death). These kinds of physiological theories about organized matter producing the mind were important for Diderot, d'Holbach, and other eighteenth century materialists who denied that matter and mind must be separate substances.[22]

Regarded as an arch-atheist like Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza (1632–77) was the only other seventeenth century philosopher to offer a comprehensive atheology. Revelation, scripture, established religion, Churches, theology—no religious foundations survive his scrutiny. He denied that he was an

atheist, for he affirmed a pantheistic, impersonal, and deterministic deity, as demonstrated by the reasonings of his treatise *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata* (1677).[23] Spinoza promptly acquired the firm reputation as a convinced atheist. Cudworth tentatively classified him as reviving ancient hylozoism. Pierre Bayle, an admirer of Cudworth's scholarship, said in his *Dictionnaire* (1697) that Spinoza was the first modern thinker to produce a coherent intellectual system for atheism. Bayle became interested in the Greek materialist and 'hylozoist' Strato, but he lacked a good understanding of Spinoza's views about god as that unique substance consisting of an infinity of attributes. Bayle could grasp the idea of Hobbes's corporeal god, so he was inconsistent about labeling Hobbes as an atheist.

By the late 1600s, some degree of skepticism became tolerable among scholars so long as it paired with devout piety, but any leniency towards materialism implied denials of divine creation and the immaterial soul. Materialism was deemed quite sufficient for atheism, and there was broad concurrence on this crucial point. When the first Robert Boyle lectures were delivered by Richard Bentley in 1692, his theme of "The Folly of Atheism" started with a clear definition of the atheist, as any impudent denier of divine providence and human immortality. Samuel Clarke's 1704 Boyle lectures titled *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* aimed his arguments for god and against materialism at any atheists reasonable enough to comprehend them. His rhetorical flourishes about the way that any intelligent person 'must' admit the conclusions of his arguments leaves the reader wondering how Clarke thought that he actually had anyone with whom to argue. Still, the way that Clarke regarded the atheist as someone reasonably considering yet rejecting arguments for god and instead preferring the self-sufficiency of nature presented the possibility of an intellectual atheist in a way that had not been admitted since Aquinas.[24]

Another intellectual atheist was already on the scene by that year of 1704, when John Toland (1670–1722) published his *Letters to Serena* (1704). Like Anthony Collins, Toland defended the right of free-thinking and philosophical authors, including civil atheists, to expose religion to reason's critical examination. With the example of Hobbes well in mind, Toland avoided affirming atheism and approved religious dogmas conducive to public order, but he challenged supernaturalism, priestly superstition (including much of popular Christianity), and the immaterial soul, with more boldness than even Lamy. Aligning with Spinoza on the ultimacy of nature, he asserted that matter's intrinsic activity can explain the world, including human mentality and sociality, and he left ample doubt about whether matter required an immaterial origin or cause.[25]

Nature Philosophy and Modern Materialism

In the wake of Hobbes and Spinoza, detecting genuine natural atheology among free-thinking and philosophical atheologians was becoming difficult

for everyone, even the disapproving theologians. Classifying Toland is a good example. Toland's rationalism apparently left him metaphysically uncommitted to issues beyond reason's competence, allowing him to say that anti-Trinitarians deserve toleration. All the same, matter's activity must be reasonably explained. Is there at least a sentient god interconnected throughout nature that is responsible for intelligently guiding matter, so that nature has purposes and life is not left to chance? Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) put such questions to Toland in correspondence during 1702–04, driving Toland towards a committed answer.

As Leibniz argued in his own philosophy, matter by definition is not sentient, so nothing that matter does, in combinations or in the aggregate, could ever be sentient either. Accordingly, there appeared to be four main alternatives: (1) Uphold matter's self-sufficiency and determination of everything despite the difficulties for explaining life or mind; (2) Affirm a godly intelligence within nature that guides all of nature's matter; (3) Affirm a supernatural god that created nature and the laws that matter obeys; or (4) Replace all matter with sentient souls (monads) harmonizing with a supreme godly soul. Option 1 should not have been called pantheism, but Toland was tempted. The difference between options 2 and 3 is important to orthodox thinkers, but religious liberals of the Enlightenment could tolerate both options. Spinozism offered a combination of option 1 and 4: ultimate reality is neither material nor spiritual in itself but it necessarily harmonizes everything. Leibniz chose option 4 to embrace idealistic freedom and personal theism. Toland already understood how stark metaphysical alternatives lay before him. John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) pointed out the explanatory difference between crediting a cosmic sentience for making matter obey laws and organize into bodies, and letting matter itself be responsible for moving and thinking (which Locke found highly dubious). Toland went further in the direction of materialism. He borrowed the recently coined term 'pantheism' for his anonymous tract titled *Socinianism Truly Stated; . . . by a Pantheist to an Orthodox Friend* (1705), but his metaphysical decision against a cosmic sentience would not be clear for fifteen more years.[26]

Toland's *Pantheisticon* (1720) came within a year of being the first published book in Europe to endorse natural atheology and materialistic pantheism. What appears to have been the first published work in Europe to expressly defended natural atheology to the point of advocating atheism appeared in print in 1719 with the title of *La Vie et l'Esprit de Mr. Benoît de Spinosa*. No author took credit, although a circle of freethinkers, neo-Stoics, and Spinozists that included Toland have been implicated in its compilation. Both books affirm naturalistic pantheism: the unthinking and uncaring material world is god. Only Vanini's *De admirandis naturae* (1616) had approached, without matching, such a confidently naturalistic position.

The second part of *La Vie et l'Esprit de Mr. Benoît de Spinosa* was published separately as *Traité Des Trois Imposteurs* (The Treatise of the Three

Impostors). The three imposters—Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad—supposedly invented Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and priests maintain control over religious multitudes by repeating lies and instilling superstitions. This kind of crude atheology was supposedly conveyed by an older and oft-copied Latin manuscript bearing the title *De tribus impostoribus* (or variants). Neither the French nor Latin tracts were Spinoza's own work, except for the second chapter of *Traité Des Trois Imposteurs*, which was largely borrowed from Spinoza's *Ethics*. Most of the chapters imitate passages found in writings by Vanini, Hobbes, Spinoza, and La Mothe Le Vayer, while some later printings of this work also draw from the French skepticism of Pierre Charron and Gabriel Naudé.[27] That second chapter contains the explicit conceptions of god affirmed by *Traité Des Trois Imposteurs*, but they are not quite Spinoza's own, although most of its sections are lightly re-written passages from the appendix to Chapter 1 of the *Ethics*. Section 10 of this chapter is least like anything in Spinoza's ethics, but it pairs well with the last section of Chapter 1, which claims that the Old and New Testaments attributed to God an entirely bodily, corporeal, and material being. Section 10 in full reads as follows:

> Assuming this, if someone asks what *God* is, I respond that this word represents to us the universal Being in which, to speak like Saint Paul, we have *life, movement & being*. This notion has nothing which is unworthy of God; for if all is God, all flows necessarily from his essence, & it is absolutely necessary that he be such as what he contains, since it is incomprehensible that beings all of which are material be maintained & contained in a being which is not so. This opinion is not new; Tertullian, one of the most learned men whom the Christians have had, pronounced against Apelles that what is not body is nothing, & against Praxeas that every substance is a body. This doctrine however was not condemned in the four first Œcumenical or general Councils.[28]

Spinoza's major works did not cite the testimony of prophets or Church Fathers in support of his identification of God with Nature, and his metaphysics held that extended matter was only one of an infinite number of divine attributes. Spinoza did not identify his god with just the material bodily world. Nor did Spinoza reduce the thinking soul to nothing but a kind of fiery fluid material, but Chapter 5 on the soul does. The *Traité Des Trois Imposteurs* presents a vaguely Stoic view of *pneuma*, but it rejects the Stoic world soul by classifying it with philosophies of incorporeality. Taken together, Chapters 2 and 5 are clear: Nature has no central mentality, no ends, and operates deterministically, so nature's regular order is not due to a cosmic sentience or rational mind, but only the physical properties of matter itself. This 'pantheism' is a natural atheology of materialism.[29]

Toland's *Pantheisticon* appeared one year later in 1720 in Latin (its English translation was published in 1751). Like *Traité Des Trois Imposteurs*,

Toland's book proposes that religions were invented, promoted by deception, and perpetuated by corrupt priestcraft. And the same declaration is made, that the everlasting, self-sufficient, and self-organizing material cosmos is the only reality:

> From that motion and intellect that constitute the force and harmony of the infinite whole, innumerable species of things arise, every individual of which is both a matter and form to itself, form being nothing else than a disposition of parts in each body. From whence therefore we may conclude, that the best reason, and most perfect order, regulate all things in the *universe*, in which there are infinite worlds, distinguished from one another, as other parts by their peculiar attributes, although, with regard to the whole, there are no parts really separate. Things moving by parts in no wise take away from the perfection of the *universe*, as thereby new perfections are produced, by a never-ceasing principle of generation. Neither is the constant dissolution of many things, that result from those parts, an hindrance to its perfection, inasmuch as this is a point of the greatest perfection; for nothing of the whole perishes, but destruction and production succeed each other by turns, and all by a perpetual change of forms, and a certain most beautiful variety and vicissitude of things, operate necessarily towards the participation, good, and preservation of the whole, and make, as it were, an everlasting circulation.[30]

Toland died in 1722, and his fellow freethinker Anthony Collins died in 1729. They had made a memorable impression on George Berkeley, who was convinced that they were both atheists in addition to anti-clerical agitators. The anti-hero of Berkeley's dialogue titled *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher* (1732) is by repute an insignificant philosopher, but the character of Alciphron is assigned sophisticated positions and arguments to propound. Alciphron's fellow atheist, Lysicles, is just a libertine who secretly fears divine retribution, but Alciphron has a dispassionate and substantial mind, embodying the openly rational atheist for the first time in Western philosophical literature. Furthermore, Alciphron's atheology is comprehensive, by offering natural atheology and materialism, skepticism against all religion, and thin versions of Moral and Civil atheology. Alciphron eventually resigns in the face of Berkeley's idealist argument that visible objects are signs due to an all-encompassing mind. Interestingly, Lysicles deflates that argument in the fourth dialogue by pointing out that no atheist has to deny that all objects may have hidden causes and that objects can be meaningful signs to us. Collecting mysterious causes, and labeling that assemblage as 'god' to announce that atheism is refuted, has no argumentative force and nothing of religious import follows.[31]

More combinations among metaphysical options emerged by the mid-1700s. Inspired by Spinozism and Leibniz's monadology, two hybrid nature

atheologies gained attention: (a) sentience could be dispersed yet interconnected throughout nature, or (b) nature's basic materials are sufficiently self-organizing. Both hybrids propose that purposive complexity can arise on its own and permit higher mentality to naturally develop. Isaac Newton's corpuscular mechanics of his *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687) lent momentum to atomistic materialism, but matter's properties of inertial and attractive forcefulness also put to rest the medieval assumption of matter's passive nature. By the end of the eighteenth century, some scientists and philosophers proposed that nature is fundamentally dynamic, not dead. They diminished the role of mere mechanism to make room for an organic sensibility and aesthetic sensitivity, which in turn enlivened the life sciences and human sciences. During the late Enlightenment, the natural necessity of strict law was no longer viewed as the needed rational liberation from the whims of a capricious creator. Freedom lay in human creativity, not in anarchy or obedience. Germany was the epicenter of this organic alternative, where interest in Bruno and Spinoza was revived, and the notion of a 'world soul' refreshed Stoic and hylozoic themes. Teleological and vitalistic theories also attempted to retain naturalistic ways to explain the autonomy of organic life and the purposiveness of mind. Because these speculations could reduce or eliminate a role for supernatural guidance, controversies over pantheism and atheism ensued with vigor. Influential figures such as J.G. Herder (1744–1803), J.W. Goethe (1749–1832), and F.W.J. Schelling (1775–1854) developed kinds of *Naturphilosophie* that depict reality as an organically developing cosmos guided by its own inherent mentality.[32]

Pico della Mirandola, Bruno, Spinoza, and Schelling, just to list a few figures, can look like quaint curiosities from the perspective of a more naturalistic atheology. Why would an atheologian permit any vestige of god to deform a natural atheology? The answer is that worldview atheologies, by their nature, are designed to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Some atheologians intermix the scientific knowledge of their day with traditional piety, subjective enthusiasms, rationalistic metaphysics, or speculative theology to round out what they regard as an eclectic yet coherently comprehensive system of thought. These kinds of philosophical systems regard materialism as too narrow, deterministic, or nihilistic, so denials of materialism (or naturalism, physicalism, and so on) are made, yet these systems are nevertheless worldview atheologies. They typically try to accommodate, as far as possible, matters that religion had handled, without imitating speculative theology's rationalizations of religious dogma. Grand-scale thinkers trying to design a broadly plausible worldview often include fundamental convictions of the world's civilizations.

The Greek model of panpolycosmism is well-suited to the ambitious worldview designer, who figures out how to match up the supreme powers revered by different civilizations and align them to reveal deep commonalities, which therefore must be more 'real' than anything described by the civilizations' worldviews separately. Science can be absorbed into this scheme,

so long as philosophical relativism is enforced, to ensure that no science can overrule important religious matters. Judgments about which framework or paradigm is more correct are suspended; the credibility awarded to any paradigm or religion is based on its harmonious integration with the others. The coherently syncretic vision of the whole is what really matters. That vision may be hierarchical so that some realities are more important, or flatly horizontal to democratically value all equally; some thinkers resort to complicated perspectival or multi-dimensional schemes. Scientific theories are interpreted selectively in order to "confirm" important religious convictions, spiritualities, and practices—and even apophatic or ecstatic mysticism—so that the sciences and the world's religions are interpreted as pointing to aspects of the same ultimate reality.

Panpolycosmism erupts periodically in different guises—sometimes as an esotericism only for the initiates, or as popular 'wisdom' for the masses. In the West, Gnosticism exemplified this creative project, as did early Christian Neoplatonism. The thirteenth century's Great Chain of Being cosmotheology is a paradigmatic example. Early nineteenth-century Romanticism and Transcendentalism, and late nineteenth-century Theosophy were manifestations, and so is today's New Age integral philosophy.[33] All panpolytheistic worldviews are somewhat atheological, not because they renounce divinities (many do affirm them), but rather because no popular religion has final truths about its gods, deities should play only their philosophized roles within the grand worldview, and religious ethics and spirituality must conform to the worldview's vision of human harmony.

Worldview philosophizing does not have to resort to panpolycosmism, since natural atheology, philosophical naturalism, and scientific materialism are available alternatives. Aristotle did not choose panpolycosmism, and neither did Spinoza, as they instead discerned a supreme deity that only reason could demonstrate. Hobbes did not expect reason to comprehend ultimate realities. He was willing to consider the hypothesis that a supreme material being impelled the cosmos from within, an admission consistent with his view that people will worship a god anyways, so religion should be thoroughly rationalized for civic ends. His materialistic predecessor Epicurus had similarly admitted useless gods into his system to explain why people find religion plausible, but not to explain anything about the rationally comprehensible cosmos.

Philosophers from Bruno, Hobbes, Spinoza, Herder, Schelling, and Hegel, down to C. S. Peirce and A.N. Whitehead, applied the label of 'god' to essential cosmic realities. Regardless of whether their metaphysical systems are best classified with naturalism, panpsychism, or idealism, they were not materialists. The label of 'pantheist', 'panentheist', or 'religious naturalist' may fit better (although 'panpolycosmist' cannot apply to any of them), but they at least approach natural atheology. They expressly reject as unreal the unnatural god(s) of religions; they do not take miracles, magic, or mysticism seriously; they reject supernatural creation, providence, and moral

supervision; they deny immaterial souls and personal immortality; and they fully naturalize and rationalize all aspects of human religiosity.[34]

Materialism is a strict form of natural atheology, by repudiating teleology and vitalism explanations and limiting rational explanation to the theories of mechanistic science. The staunchest worldview atheologians during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, notably Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Claude Helvétius, Baron D'Holbach, Marquis de Condorcet, Ludwig Feuerbach, Herbert Spencer, Ludwig Büchner, and Ernst Haeckel, formulated scientific materialisms as thorough as Hobbes's while leaving no role for any deity. They all accepted the label of 'atheist' except for Spencer, who kept up British empiricism's disdain for 'atheism' in favor of 'agnosticism'. That reticence also characterized most American thinkers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[35]

La Mettrie was heavily indebted to the natural atheologies of Gassendi, Lamy, and Toland, and in many ways he fulfilled the destiny of their scientific and philosophical speculations. His book *L'Homme machine* (Man the Machine, 1747) was in many ways the first treatise to be scientifically materialistic, thoroughly secular, and openly atheistic since Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*. Only Vanini's *De admirandis naturae* (1616) and Jean Meslier's *Mémoire* (1729) pre-date La Mettrie's example of open naturalism, but those authors were unable to utilize experimental science. If the quasi-pantheism of Vanini, Bruno, and Spinoza and the material god of Hobbes diminishes the atheological status of their philosophies, then La Mettrie's strict materialism easily leaps above them all.

Additional thorough-going materialisms soon followed. Claude Helvétius defended materialism in the forms of sensationalism and hedonism with his hugely controversial treatise *De l'esprit* (1758, promptly translated as *Essays on the Mind*). Although Denis Diderot (1713–84) only hesitantly aligned with the materialists late in life, his associate with the *Encyclopédie* and literary executor, Jacques-André Naigeon, published a boldly materialist treatise titled *Le militaire philosophe, ou Difficultés sur la religion, proposées au Pére Malebranche* (1768).[27] This tradition continued with the next notorious materialist, Baron D'Holbach, in his anonymously published *La Systeme de la Nature, ou Des loix du monde physique et du monde moral* (The System of Nature, or The Laws of the Physical World and Moral World, 1770). His treatise made him the most widely read materialist and atheist during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, making an explosive impact upon later stages of the Enlightenment.[36]

Marquis de Condorcet's *L'Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1795, published as Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind in 1796), advanced the atheological project of utilizing human sciences, such as medicine, anthropology, and sociology, for the improvement of humanity's welfare. Materialist atheology during the nineteenth century continued to advance this project of understanding human society in entirely natural terms, exemplified by Herbert Spencer's

Social Statics (1851) and subsequent works on ethics and politics. The natural sciences kept pace. Ludwig Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff* (Force and Matter, 1855) was just the first in a series of volumes in which he elaborated a materialist natural philosophy. Worldview atheology in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries continued to follow the schematic organization laid down by Büchner: appeal to science for the self-sufficiency of nature, deny ultimate teleological ends to the world or to life, reject vitalistic or mentalistic forces inexplicable by science, and tell humanity's story using natural evolution and a history of culture's progress.

The foremost expert in natural history, Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), contributed his compendious five-volume work titled *Kosmos* (Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe, 1845–62), which similarly promoted an entirely naturalistic worldview. Naturalistic atheology during the late nineteenth century continued to advance this project of understanding humanity and society in entirely natural terms. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection profoundly advanced naturalism's capacity to explain life and humanity's origins, in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). Adapting the concept of Darwinian evolution to his own philosophical systematizing, Spencer assigned a central cosmic role to evolution in a more general sense in his treatise titled *First Principles, A System of Synthetic Philosophy*, which went through six editions from 1862 until 1904.[37] Biologist Ernst Haeckel was the next great German evolutionary atheologian, publishing his *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* (The History of Creation, 1868) and then *Die Welträthsel* (The Riddle of the Universe, 1895–99). Ernst Mach rose to the greatest philosophical prominence, principally from his treatise *Die Mechanik in ihrer Entwickelung: historisch-kritisch dargestellt* (The Science of Mechanics, 1883). Chemist Wilhelm Ostwald's *Grundriss der Naturphilosophie* (Outline of Natural Philosophy, 1908) advanced a broad scientific materialism. In France, physician and sociologist Charles Letourneau described this kind of worldview in *Science et matérialism* (1891).[38]

With the coming of the twentieth century, the contrast between philosophical naturalism and scientific naturalism inherited the older difference between worldview atheology and strict materialism. Philosophical naturalism matured in America with George Santayana's *The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress* (1905–06), and pragmatist John Dewey assembled a nonreligious philosophical system in several books during the 1920s and 1930s, notably *Experience and Nature* (1925). By contrast, W. V. Quine's *Word and Object* proclaimed straightforward scientific naturalism: "What reality is like is the business of scientists" (1960, 22). In England, the natural atheology of scientific humanist Julian Huxley during the mid-twentieth century exemplifies scientific naturalism's rise to dominance, as do the writings of biologist Richard Dawkins today.

The contemporary scene in the West is witnessing an intellectual rivalry between several conservative religions, a few speculative panpolycosmisms,

and varieties of natural atheologies. Eastern worldviews are similarly sorting themselves into one or another of these three categories. The spirit of skepticism is alive and well within the naturalisms because the knowledge of science can be applied to cast doubt on anything unnatural, especially religious superstitions, the paranormal, and the "woo" of spirituality.[39]

Although skepticism is presently aligned with naturalistic worldviews, that was not the case for most of modern intellectual history.

Skeptical Atheology

During the period of 1400 to 1800 skepticism took its own path, largely separated from worldview atheology. By the early 1800s, the acceptability of scientific knowledge to the philosophical skeptic was becoming conceivable, and the now-familiar alliance between science and skepticism began to emerge. Before the Enlightenment, philosophical skepticism involved serious doubt concerning knowledge of the external world, and perhaps doubt about the capacities of reasoning faculties as well. Scientific theorizing about invisible matters such as atoms and forces seemed dubious at best for such philosophical skepticism, and metaphysical speculation could not be encouraged at all.

Philosophical skepticism and worldview atheology were sporadically taken seriously by medieval theology. The example was already set for Church theologians by Augustine of Hippo (354–430), who responded to philosophical skepticism in *Contra Academicos* (Against the Academicians, 386) and *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos* (The City of God against the Pagans, c.412). Augustine's works served as a major resource about skepticism and natural atheology for many centuries afterwards while many ancient philosophers were unavailable in Latin Europe. Byzantine Greeks and Islamic philosophers such as Al-Ghazali (c.1058–1111) could read some writings of Greek and Roman skeptics.[40]

Although Aquinas's appreciation for Aristotle inspired no entanglement with skepticism, his near-contemporaries Henry of Ghent (c.1217–93) and John Duns Scotus (1265–1308) explored responses to robust skepticism. Skepticism would not subside, however, after it was elevated to its medieval heights in the writings of nominalist William of Ockham (c.1287–1347). Late Renaissance defenders of Aristotelian or Platonic theological systems gradually began to grapple with Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism in freshly translated form. Sextus Empiricus reappeared in the 1560s, around the time that Cicero's *Academica* was read once again. Estranged from its atheological and anti-metaphysical context, skepticism was far more often allied with demonstrating human limitations to self-assisted knowledge, further justifying divinely-inspired knowledge about supernatural matters.[41]

Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) was a powerful voice of religious skepticism, but he harnessed it to his conviction that the intellect is incompetent regarding religiosity, so one must humbly submit to faith and accept god's

salvation. He expected the downfall of both metaphysical philosophy and sacred theology. His "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" in the first (1580) edition of his *Essais* reproved all philosophical theorizing, and any theology reliant on such theorizing, for exceeding the reach of human understanding. Montaigne appealed to the basics of the Pyrrhonian skepticism relayed by Sextus Empiricus to argue that no worldview, pagan or Christian, could attain rational justification. This is a skeptical atheology indeed—and not the less impressive just because he would not be an atheist. His moralism demanded the supreme good for humanity, which lies in heartfelt religiosity from god's salvation, as the source of direct faith permitting genuine religious belief.[42]

Montaigne's disciple Pierre Charron (1541–1603) found fault with theology for abetting atheism in his book *Les trois véritez* (1595). Interminable theological disputes about an admittedly unknowable god are just as much a distraction from personal faith as the ordinary causes for atheism in madness, mundane lusts, failing to see providence in natural events, not having one's prayers answered, and supposing that nature could function independently. In his next work on theology, *De la sagesse* (1601), Charron elaborated ancient skepticism so thoroughly that even arguments from nature's design cannot demonstrate that it had a creator. However, he conjoined that skepticism with humble stoic wisdom in order to advocate submissive piety. Despite Charron's efforts to defend religious faith, he was suspected of aiding atheism by other scholars such as Marin Mersenne (1588–1648).[43]

Mersenne's *L'impiété des déistes, athées et libertins de ce temps* (The Impiety of Deists, Atheists, and Libertines of these Times, 1624) elaborates his opposition to what he viewed as dangerous skepticism in Charron, and atheist naturalism in Cardano and Bruno. Mersenne was favorable towards experimental science, as shown by his advocacy for Galileo and Gassendi, and displayed in his moderate empirical position taken in *La vérité des sciences, contre les septiques ou pyrrhoniens* (The Truth of the Sciences against the Sceptics and Pyrrhonians, 1625). His abiding respect for Pyrrhonism was decisive for his overall philosophy. In *Questions théologiques, physiques, morales et mathématiques* (1634) he argued that demonstrative knowledge is not possible for any area of human understanding except mathematics. That modest empiricism conveniently allowed Mersenne to remain uncommitted about controversial scientific theories, metaphysical systems, or theological issues, leaving supernatural matters to religious faith.[44]

Jean Bodin (c.1530–96) was more generous to religious skepticism despite his own firm Christian faith. His Latin treatise *Colloquium heptaplomeres de rerum sublimium arcanis abditis* (Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime, 1588) was not published during his lifetime, but it was endlessly copied and recopied over the next two centuries until many intellectuals had either read it or had heard about it. Bodin favored religious toleration and detested atheists, yet his work appears to be the first in Europe to supply a confident voice to a religious skeptic. Imitating

Cicero's dialogue format, Bodin's seven interlocutors defend different religions, excepting one character, Senamus, who plays the role of a dubious skeptic. Senamus is not taken seriously, and his questions provoke ready theological answers. However, his personal disbelief survives until the end. He is not converted to the true faith, a typical climactic moment in such texts involving unbelievers. His toughest skeptical arguments even expose some theological conundrums. He asks, "What then does it mean that God is everywhere? For if He is everywhere, He is in a place; if in a place, He also must be corporeal." He is immediately told that "God is everywhere and nowhere." But Senamus won't hear of it: "Therefore contradictions are at the same time true; if God is here, God is not here." He also declares, "Nothing seems good to me which happens outside of nature, as Aristotle writes." Not until Nicolas Malebranche's *Conversations chrétiennes* (1677) was this openly atheist doubt (voiced by the character of Aristarque) again heard in philosophical disputation. As for Malebranche, his own religious philosophy was dependent on Cartesian rationalism. His critique of natural theology, that it mistakenly supposes that a finite mind can have a representational idea of an infinite god, was used by critics to show how Malebranche's own ontological argument from god's definition must fall short as well.[45]

Pascal and Descartes paid close attention to the course of skepticism in French thought. Indebted to the thorough skepticism of Montaigne and Charron, Blaise Pascal (1623–62) articulated a heartfelt plea for the faith of god's grace, necessary for a humanity lost in agnostic skepticism about cosmic and eternal matters beyond reason's competence.[46] Pascal's famous wager, that one should wisely bet on God, is addressed in the chapter on Moral atheology. René Descartes (1596–1650) assembled components for a skeptical atheology in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641). By requiring knowledge to be something that cannot possibly be doubted under any imaginable circumstances, very little can truly be known by science, religion, or theology, especially about god, even if Cartesian arguments for god's existence succeed. (The chapter on Rationalist atheology examines ontological arguments and related strategies.) Descartes's contemporaries, including Mersenne, worried that the philosophical support for God, even if it attained certainty, was too thin, leaving much about theology in doubt. Theologians were also troubled by Descartes's plan to assign responsibility for best knowing God to philosophy rather than theology. Defenders of scholasticism and Thomism promptly turned their critical attention towards Cartesianism as a fresh source of unorthodoxy and suspected atheism.[47]

Even eighteenth-century empiricism, firmly accepting the immediately perceivable world, left little opportunity (or so it seemed then) for comprehending anything, such a benevolent creator, behind it. Isaac Newton's physics lent great credibility to empirical science, but much of philosophy was slow to follow. Empiricism treated science instrumentally, not realistically (a strategy pursued down to this day), while a realistic appreciation for

lawful nature led through deism on the way to materialism, so empiricism and naturalism remained mostly separated.

The possibility, exemplified in Hobbes, of a coordinated skeptical and naturalistic position is illustrated in the writings of Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), Jean Meslier (1664–1729), and Denis Diderot (1713–84). Bayle never admitted impiety publicly, preferring broad tolerance for all faiths. He wielded methods from both Pyrrhonist and Academic skepticism against revealed and natural theologies and most metaphysical systems of the day in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697, 2nd edn 1702). Bayle tried to lessen the severity of atheism by occasionally arguing that the evils of fanaticism and superstition are worse than mere unbelief, as Plutarch's essay "On Superstition" had argued long ago. While Bayle's limited speculations about a dynamical theory of matter did not reach a large audience, his transmission of philosophical and atheological arguments had immense influence across Europe. His most consequential impact was probably made upon a highly impressed David Hume.[48]

Jean Meslier composed his *Mémoire* (1729, but not published in full until 1864) to be as skeptical as possible about every claim made not only by Christianity but also any supernaturalism, deism, dualism, or pantheism. Voltaire's published "extract" in 1761, titled *Extrait des sentiments de Jean Meslier*, was cleverly assembled by selecting passages and adding new passages. Whether Voltaire personally added sentences to the text is not known, but that he endorsed a book designed to make the unbelieving priest Meslier sound like an anti-Catholic partisan and a pious deist, like himself. Meslier's original lengthy volume was an exercise in nothing but complete atheism, covering core atheological arguments from naturalistic, skeptical, moralist, and civic-minded stances with wit and erudition.[49] Most of his objections to religion denounce its oppression of reason, learning, and virtue. Meslier puts the grossest crudities, meanest extortions, and vicious horrors perpetrated by religion on display for the reader by simply depicting what he has observed around him in France. He wields the tools of skepticism with impressive skill, and frequently quotes passages from Montaigne's *Essays*. He also quotes liberally from pagan and heretical sources such as Pliny, Tacitus, Lucian, Vanini, and *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy*. Meslier was a highly educated priest who knew his Bible and his Church's history intimately, exposing dozens upon dozens of their errors, fabrications, impossibilities, iniquities, contortions, and contradictions. His arguments against the existence of god are impressively clear and reasoned. Of particular interest are these aspects of his treatise: the emphasis he places on denying that humanity can conceive the infinite so that equating the infinite with a perfect god is nonsense; the way he refutes the notion of anything unnatural creating or causing natural matters; and the reasoning he offers against the mind-body dualisms of Malebranche and Descartes.

Diderot's *Pensées philosophiques* (1746) applies a reasoned skepticism leading towards deism. His *Lettre sur les aveugles* (Letter on the Blind, 1749)

went further in the direction of epistemic relativism, expressing skeptical doubts about metaphysics and god, and suggesting that an unimaginably vast material universe cyclically and developmentally produced all life. After three month's imprisonment, Diderot's atheism and secularity only intensified. However, his articles in the monumental *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences* (1751–72) veered back to a cautiously skeptical approach, and his materialist views were not published until the last years of his life. Diderot composed *Le rêve d'Alembert* (d'Alembert's Dream) in 1769 and only showed it to friends for many years. Diderot exemplifies the philosophical dilemma, not to speak of the political dilemma, over whether to construct a fully materialistic worldview using the little knowledge science could then provide, or to skeptically take apart the supports for theism using the resources of rationalist thinking. Diderot finally formulated a version of atomistic hylozoism, rendering god superfluous since a supernatural creator or a guiding mind is unnecessary for understanding the cosmos's development.[50]

By the mid-eighteenth century, scientific secularism had enough resources to begin to challenge the foundations of religion resting upon revelation. The second science to critically examine religion, after seventeenth-century astronomy could not observe perfect heavenly bodies or a heavenly throne, was the maturing field of history. Why should the Bible enjoy a credible status alongside the best-verified accounts of the past? Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza had questioned key dogmas, such as whether Moses could have composed the first five books of the Old Testament. Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) was a pioneer applying expertise in Greek and Latin to expose the Bible's episodic construction, but his greatest impact came after his death when G. E. Lessing edited Reimarus's most controversial writings about an ethical but most human Jesus as "Fragments by an Anonymous Writer" (1774–78).

Successive waves of criticism soon rocked Christianity: deists questioning miracles; language scholars questioning texts, editions, and translations; Bible interpreters wielding tools of hermeneutics; and archaeologists and historians questioning Biblical narratives. The accumulated doubts towards the Bible's literal veracity proved unstoppable. Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) explained how religion's essence resides in the feeling and imagination of the human mind, and his *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* (1848) proposed that gods are projections of psychological drives to personify nature. German scholars maintained leadership in critical Biblical studies for many decades. Ferdinand Christian Baur founded the Tübingen school of scriptural exegesis and criticism in such works as *Paulus der Apostel Jesu Christi* (Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, 1845). Tübingen's notorious scholar David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) altered Biblical scholarship permanently with his *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined, 1835–36).[51]

Skeptical Empiricism

In England, skeptical atheology was the dominant method of philosophical atheology. David Hume, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Henry Huxley, and Bertrand Russell positioned their empiricisms in opposition against metaphysical materialisms as well as supernaturalist theologies. None of them sought the label of atheism.

Hume, the Scottish empiricist (but no materialist), was skeptical about more than revelations and miracles. His *Natural History of Religion* (1757) directed skeptical doubts and moral concerns at polytheism and monotheism. His *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) questioned the ability of any human mind to know the ultimate causes of the world or supreme realities beyond the observable world. Hume's atheology did not endorse atheism and he denied being an atheist, since he understood atheism as asserting god's non-existence, a claim that cannot be known. Hume's larger concern was not atheism, but the defense of intellectual freethought. In Part 1 of *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, the character Philo (who usually voices Hume's views) brings up the topics of freethought and questioning religion to point out how they are accused of foolishly causing social disruption. Philo quotes Francis Bacon, an earlier English empiricist and firm Anglican:

> atheists nowadays have a double share of folly; for they are not contented to say in their hearts there is no God, but they also utter that impiety with their lips, and are thereby guilty of multiplied indiscretion and imprudence.[52]

Philo promptly defends people who pertinently question priests, the Church, and even God, but Philo does not return to the issue of atheism and atheism receives no defense.

Hume's strict empiricism was challenged by Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Kant did agree that rationalist demonstrations for the existence of god, such as ontological and cosmological arguments, cannot succeed. For Kant, the skeptical atheist is not wrong for distrusting such transcendental and speculative reasonings, yet the dogmatic atheist declaring that god does not exist cannot be trusted either, because people have sound moral reasons to believe that god must exist.[53] Moral arguments for god inspired by Kant are discussed in the chapter on Moral atheology.

The post-Kantian aftermath only accelerated philosophical interest in skeptical arguments.[54] Few literary figures espoused atheism in the English language during the first half of the nineteenth century. Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Necessity of Atheism" (1811) was a youthful outburst, but it clearly stated the skeptical challenge to theology. Philosophical voices were typically cautious. John Stuart Mill was not an archetypal skeptic, yet his

empiricism shared the skeptical reticence towards both religion and atheism. His autobiography recounts how he was raised by his nonbelieving father, James Mill, as a nonbeliever too. Having never accepted theism, the son rejected the label of atheism just as his father did. John Stuart Mill considerably advanced the empiricist tradition; when his philosophical mind turned to religion, his atheological criticisms of theology also rejected atheism. The conclusion of his essay "Theism," published in the volume *Three Essays on Religion* in 1874 after Mill's death, affirms skepticism (spelled 'scepticism' in England) but not atheism:

> . . . the rational attitude of a thinking mind towards the supernatural, whether in natural or in revealed religion, is that of scepticism as distinguished from belief on the one hand, and from atheism on the other: including, in the present case, under atheism, the negative as well as the positive form of disbelief in a God, viz., not only the dogmatic denial of his existence, but the denial that there is any evidence on either side, which for most practical purposes amounts to the same thing as if the existence of a God had been disproved. If we are right in the conclusions to which we have been led by the preceding inquiry there is evidence, but insufficient for proof, and amounting only to one of the lower degrees of probability.[55]

Mill pointedly characterized atheism as the unreasonable position that god's existence can be denied, or at least that no evidence exists for considering god's existence. He regarded atheism in general as dogmatic. It is dogmatic to reject without reason a fair consideration of the evidence, and it is dogmatic to confidently deny god's existence when the balance of evidence only supports skeptical doubt. The greatest challenger to Mill's empiricist philosophy during the two generations after his death was F.H. Bradley's neo-Hegelian idealism. Bradley treated his all-encompassing metaphysics of experience as the 'Absolute' reality while his rationalism allowed him to skeptically criticize naturalism. His philosophical peers were not deceived, grasping how Bradley's skepticism deprived this Absolute of any divine attributes. Both Mill and Bradley exemplified the Victorian Age's combination of skepticism and moralism for nobly civic ends. They represented the best of democratic liberalism, in the forms of utilitarianism and socialism respectively, until World War I arrived.

Thomas Henry Huxley was the foremost advocate for evolution and freethought during the late nineteenth century, He carried the banner of skepticism by renaming it without modifying it—he judged that free-thinking skepticism deserved the label of 'agnosticism'. His 1889 essay "Agnosticism" relates how he arrived at this new name, standing for an old principle:

> In matters of the intellect, follow your reason as far as it will take you, without regard to any other consideration. And negatively: In matters

> of the intellect, do not pretend that conclusions are certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable.[56]

Huxley's philosophical method of Rationalist atheology, which he called agnosticism, requires the freethinker to skeptically withhold assent from any metaphysical or theological worldview—where every natural worldview based on science gets lumped together with unreasonable metaphysics about ultimate realities. By specifically rejecting materialism right along with theism, Huxley widened the growing schism between scientific knowledge and philosophical naturalism. In America, William James's empiricist version of pragmatism in his book *Pragmatism* (1907) supported skepticism towards dogmatic religion and supernaturalism, while supporting the validity of energizing religious faith on moral grounds.

Empiricists were not alone assigning the question of god's existence to that agnostic status. Some post-Kantians on the Continent omitted a deity from their philosophical systems while taking close interest in the significance of human religiosity. Prominent examples are Charles Renouvier's four-volume *Essais de critique générale* (1854–64), Henri Bergson's *L'Évolution créatrice* (Creative Evolution, 1907), Benedetto Croce's four-volume *Filosofia come scienza dello spirit* (Philosophy of the Spirit, 1902–17), Ernst Cassirer's three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–29), and Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time, 1927). Another agnosticism during this era was heard in the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose 1945 essay "Existentialism is a Humanism" urged the abandonment of god and religiosity.

Loyal empiricists continued to be the mainstay of English-language skepticism. Bertrand Russell's thoughts on atheism and agnosticism are well expressed in a brief address titled "Am I an Atheist or an Agnostic? A Plea for Tolerance in the Face of New Dogmas" (1949). Russell acknowledges the philosophical way that 'atheism' has been defined as certain knowledge that no god exists, so his own scientific empiricism has no way to endorse such knowledge. Although he cannot be a philosophical atheist in that sense, he goes on to declare how any ordinary sense to atheism only involves reasonable disbelief in gods, not certain knowledge. On reasonable grounds anyone should be a disbeliever in all gods, Russell stated. He says of any gods: "I do not think that their existence is an alternative that is sufficiently probable to be worth serious consideration" and he says of his fellow rationalists, "speaking popularly, I think that all of us would say in regard to those gods that we are Atheists."[57] By allowing that atheism covers skeptical unbelief as well as affirming disbelief, Russell pointed the way for later empiricist approaches to religion by A. J. Ayer in "Logical Positivism, A Debate" (1957), Antony Flew in *The Presumption of Atheism* (1976); and Richard Rorty in "Anti-Clericalism and Atheism" (2003).

Philosophical theologians proved to be no less capable of skepticism than agnostic philosophers. The twentieth century witnessed the

flourishing of several radical theologies, each combining rigorous skepticism about knowing and/or encountering god with pious faith. Karl Barth (1886–1968) and his multi-volume *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Church Dogmatics, 1932–67) skeptically denied that knowledge of god is possible through any Church, natural theology, or miraculous revelation, so theology can only discuss how the Biblical Christ is experienced by the faithful. Some evangelical Calvinists rejected the Catholic Church's interpretations of the Bible in favor of scriptural literalism, and then skeptically disagreed among each other over which Bible translation accurately conveys God's word. Other Calvinists, following Lutheran theologians Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) and Paul Tillich (1886–1965), offered ways to demythologizing Christianity.

Bultmann's *Kerygma und Mythos* (1948) rejects miracles as incredible, and doubts that Jesus's corpse was resurrected. The significance of Jesus's message constitutes the redeeming faith for Christians, not fictional myths about past events, which regrettably got written into New Testament gospel: "The mythology of the New Testament is in essence that of Jewish apocalyptic and the Gnostic redemption myths." Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* (1951–57) similarly urged skeptical agnosticism about any theistic deity, although he retained 'god' as an entirely metaphysical term. For Tillich, it is necessary to deny that god exists, since merely existing as some sort of entity is beneath god. An accurate statement about god as Being-itself would be: "god as the ground of being infinitely transcends everything that is." He discarded as "primitive" the belief that god "has brought the universe into being at a certain moment (five thousand or five billion years ago), governs it according to a plan, directs it toward an end, interferes with its ordinary processes in order to overcome resistance and to fulfill his purpose, and will bring it to consummation in a final catastrophe."[58] When theology replaces religion with metaphysics, the capitulation to philosophical atheology is near.

This chapter's overview of European atheologies must come to halt. Looking back across five centuries of atheology, these atheologians stand out in their respective categories:

Materialism/Civicism: Machiavelli, Hobbes, La Mettrie, D'Holbach, Wollstonecraft, Feuerbach, Marx, Büchner, Santayana, Dewey

Skepticism/Moralism: Montaigne, Meslier, Hume, Diderot, Comte, Mill, Huxley, Nietzsche, James, Freud, Russell, Sartre

These thinkers deeply pondered theism's capacity to incorporate modernity's expectations about rationality, science's knowledge, the moral life, and the civil sphere. The next four chapters on Rationalist atheology, Scientific atheology, Moral atheology, and Civil atheology offer comprehensive and systematic expositions of their effective criticisms of supernaturalism.

Notes

1 See Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (1997); Moorhead, *Gregory the Great* (2005); Biller and Hudson, ed., *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530* (1996); and Buringh, *Medieval Manuscript Production in the Latin West* (2010).

2 The mistaken contrary view has been endlessly repeated, especially by legions of religious intellectual historians. A prominent example is Buckley; see his Introduction to his book *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (1987), and his *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism* (2004). Buckley rightly notes how modern atheism mostly encountered theologians wielding philosophy, yet he does not sufficiently ponder the philosophical and atheological genealogy that engendered the theism defended by those theologians.

3 Weltecke, "The Medieval Period" (2013). On the transmission of patristic theology, see Backus, *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists* (1997). On medieval theology, consult Hamilton and Hamilton, ed., *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c.650–c.1450* (1998); Grant, *God and Reason in the Middle Ages* (2001); Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (2004); and Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* (2008). On Jewish philosophy and atheology, see Popkin, "Jewish Anti-Christian Arguments as a Source of Irreligion From the Seventeenth to the Early Nineteenth Century" (1992), and Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (1996). On Islamic theology one may start by consulting Nasr and Leaman, ed., *History of Islamic Philosophy* (1996). On Islamic freethought, consult Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (1999), especially chap. 4, and Heck, *Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion* (2014). An ambitious but overreaching effort is by Azinfar, *Atheism in the Medieval Islamic & European World* (2008).

4 On Philoponus, see Sorabji, ed., *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science* (2010). On Buridan, see Klima, *John Buridan* (2008). On Bacon, see Clegg, *The First Scientist: A Life of Roger Bacon* (2003), and Power, *Roger Bacon and the Defence of Christendom* (2013). See also Lang, *Aristotle's Physics and Its Medieval Varieties* (1992), and Freeman, ed., *A New History of Early Christianity* (2009). The heavy influence of Islamic science, as a transmitter and originator, must not be overlooked. See Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (2007), and Freely, *Aladdin's Lamp: How Greek Science Came to Europe Through the Islamic World* (2010).

5 Christianity's version of the history of science is represented by Hannam, *The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution* (2011). A corrective to the biased agenda that Hannam represents was already published by Freeman, *The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason* (2003). See also Carrier, "Christianity Was Not Responsible for Modern Science" (2011). A broad overview is provided by Gaukroger, *The Emergence of a Scientific Culture: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1210–1685* (2006).

6 See Lagerlund, ed., *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background* (2010). On Averroes, consult Glasner, *Averroes' Physics: A Turning Point in Medieval Natural Philosophy* (2009). Aquinas, see *Summa Theologiae, Questions on God* (2006), and *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book One: God* (1975). On Aquinas see Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (1997), and Davies, "Aquinas and Atheism" (2013). The 1277 edict is published as "Condemnation of 219 Propositions," in Hyman et al., ed., *Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (2010), pp. 541–550. Byzantium thinkers accessed far more Greek thought long before Europeans; see Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* (2008).

On the widespread medieval phenomena of discussing 'atheism' without any living atheists, see Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729* (1990), chap. 3.

7 This recovery of ancient philosophers, and the atheology often encountered in their writings, is discussed in Popkin and Vanderjagt, ed., *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1993); Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729: The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (1990), chap. 6; and Zerba, *Doubt and Skepticism in Antiquity and the Renaissance* (2012). On the growing accessibility of Epicurus during the Renaissance, see Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence* (2010); Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance* (2014); and Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729* (2016), chap. 1. On the reception of Cicero, see also Altman, ed., *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Cicero* (2015). Sextus Empiricus was not translated into Latin until the Stephanus edition of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* in 1562 and the Hervet edition of *Adversus Mathematicos* in 1569. Consult Neto and Popkin, ed., *Skepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought* (2004).

8 The reader can begin with Hunter and Wootton, ed., *Atheism From the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (1992). On Italy, see Owen, *The Skeptics of the Italian Renaissance* (1893); Davidson, "Atheism in Italy, 1500–1700" (1992); Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy*, vol. 1 (2008); and Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop: Inquisition, Forbidden Books, and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice* (2012). On France, see Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance (1533–1601)* (1957); Berriot, *Athéismes et athéistes au XVIe siecle en France* (1984); Lebvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (1982); Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729*: *The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (1990); and Kors, *Naturalism and Unbelief in France, 1650–1729* (2016), chap. 1. On England, see Buckley, *Atheism in the English Renaissance* (1932).

9 Valla, *On Pleasure, De Voluptate* (1977). Valla, *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie* (1982). Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense: Lorenzo Valla's Humanist Critique of Scholastic Philosophy* (2009). See De Panizza Lorch, "The Epicurean in Lorenzo Valla's *On Pleasure*" (1991); Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition* (1992), chap. 6; Fubini, *Humanism and Secularization: From Petrarch to Valla* (2003), chap. 5.

10 See Randall Jr., *The School of Padua and the Emergence of Modern Science* (1961); Davidson, "Atheism in Italy, 1500–1700" (1992); and Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy*, vol. 1 (2008). Also consult Pine, *Pietro Pomponazzi: Radical Philosopher of the Renaissance* (1986); Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos: The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer* (2000); Dougherty, ed., *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays* (2008); and Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man: A New Translation and Commentary* (2012). See also Martin, *Subverting Aristotle: Religion, History and Philosophy in Early Modern Science* (2014), and Muratori and Paganini, ed., *Early Modern Philosophers and the Renaissance Legacy* (2016). The question whether the philosophies of northern Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries modestly influenced seventeenth-century freethought in northern Europe is examined by Martin, "Rethinking Renaissance Averroism" (2007).

11 See Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel, Prophet of the Restitution of All Things: His Life and Thought* (1981), and Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (1982), chap. 2. Philippe de Mornay's book was translated as *A Woorke Concerning the Trewnesse of the Christian Religion* (1587).

12 On Bruno, see Gatti, ed., *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher of the Renaissance* (2002), and Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic* (2009).

13 As translated in Owen, *The Skeptics of the Italian Renaissance* (1893), p. 378. More of Vanini's dialogues are translated as "Eight Philosophical Dialogues of Giulio Cesare Vanini" (2011). On Vanini, see Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea: Skepticism and Faith in the Renaissance* (1964), chap. 2; Namer, *La vie et l'oeuvre de J. C. Vanini, prince des libertins, mort à Toulouse sur le bûcher en 1619* (1980); Davidson, "Atheism in Italy, 1500–1700" (1992); Cavaillé, ed., *Vanini* (1998); and Foucault, *Un philosophe libertin dans l'Europe baroque: Giulio Cesare Vanini, 1585–1619* (2003).

14 See Giacone, *Le Cymbalum mundi, Actes du colloque de Rome (3–6 novembre 2000)* (2003). On the *Cymbalum mundi* and Tahureau, see Gauna, *Upwellings: First Expressions of Unbelief in the Printed Literature of the French Renaissance* (1992). Fabbri, *Adversus impios atheos disputationes quatuor philosophicae* (1627). On these writings the reader can also consult Schneider, *Der Libertin* (1970), and Busson, *Le rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance (1533–1601)* (1971).

15 Anon., *Theophrastus redivivus* (1981). See also Gregory, *Theophrastus redivivus: Erudizione e ateismo nel Seicento* (1979), and Gengoux, ed., *Entre le Renaissance et les lumiéres: Le Theophrastus redivivus* (2012). Also consult Betts, *Early Deism in France: From the so-called 'déistes' of Lyon (1564) to Voltaire's 'Lettres philosophiques' (1734)* (1984), and Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England: Theology, Politics, and Newtonian Public Science* (2009).

16 Pomian-Srzednicki, *Religious Change in Contemporary Poland: Secularization and Politics* (1982), pp. 103–104.

17 Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1996), chaps. 31 and 34. On god as a corporeal spirit, see Hobbes, "An Answer to Bishop Bramhall" (1750). See also Cromartie, "The God of Thomas Hobbes" (2008), and Springborg, "Hobbes's Challenge to Descartes, Bramhall and Boyle: A Corporeal God" (2012).

18 Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1996), chap. 32. See Paganini, "Hobbes and the Continental Tradition of Skepticism" (2004).

19 Martinich explores this question in "The Bible and Protestantism in *Leviathan*" (2007). See also Tuck, "Hobbes's 'Christian Atheism'" (1992). Martinich's efforts to bend Hobbes into a religious stance in *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (2002), receive their refutation by Zagorin, *Hobbes and the Law of Nature* (2009). Berman discusses Hobbes's role in spreading atheism in *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (1988), chap. 2. See also Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England, 1640–1700* (2007).

20 Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1996), chap. 6.

21 Bacon's rejection of atheism is in a chapter in his *Essays*, reprinted in Bacon, *The Major Works* (2002), pp. 371–373. On Galileo and astronomy, see Lattis, *Between Copernicus and Galileo: Christoph Clavius and the Collapse of Ptolemaic Cosmology* (1994). The Church's dealings with Galileo are recounted by Heilbron, *Galileo* (2010). On the rising influence of experimental and mathematical physics upon freethought and atheological materialism, consult Gaukroger, ed., *The Uses of Antiquity: The Scientific Revolution and the Classical Tradition* (1991); Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (2001); Spiller, *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature: The Art of Making Knowledge, 1580–1670* (2004); Osler, *Divine Will and the Mechanical Philosophy: Gassendi and Descartes on Contingency and Necessity in the Created World* (2004); Palmerino and Thijssen, ed., *The Reception of Galilean Science of Motion in Seventeenth Century Europe* (2004); Wood,

Science and Dissent in England, 1688–1945 (2004); Gaukroger, *The Emergence of a Scientific Culture: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1210–1685* (2006); Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (2008); and Sorell et al., ed., *Scientia in Early Modern Philosophy: Seventeenth-Century Thinkers on Demonstrative Knowledge From First Principles* (2009). On Gassendi, see Joy, *Gassendi the Atomist: Advocate of History in an Age of Science* (1987); Murr, "Gassendi's Skepticism as a Religious Attitude" (1993); Fisher, *Pierre Gassendi's Philosophy and Science: Atomism for Empiricists* (2005); and Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729* (2016), chap. 2. On Cavendich, see Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy During the Scientific Revolution* (2010).

22 Spink, *French Free-Thought From Gassendi to Voltaire* (1960), chap. 7, and Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729* (2016), chap. 3. Gaultier, *Réponse en forme de dissertation à un théologien sur les sentiments des sceptiques* (2004). Bloch, "Scepticisme et religion dans la *Réponse à un théologien* du médecin Gaultier et sa postérité clandestine" (1993). Also consult Distelzweig et al., ed., *Early Modern Medicine and Natural Philosophy* (2015).

23 The reader may consult Mason, *The God of Spinoza: A Philosophical Study* (1997), See also Yovel, ed., *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics* (1991).

24 Bentley, *The Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism* (1693), lecture 1. Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings* (1998). See also MacIntosh, ed., *Boyle on Atheism* (2005).

25 On Toland, consult Daniel, *John Toland: His Methods, Manners, and Mind* (1984); Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture* (2003); and Brown, *A Political Biography of John Toland* (2012).

26 Woolhouse, *Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz: The Concept of Substance in Seventeenth Century Metaphysics* (2002); Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729* (2016), chap. 4. See also Duncan, "'Toland, Leibniz, and Active Matter" (2012).

27 The 1777 publication by Marc-Michael Rey is the text discussed here, as translated by Anderson, *The Treatise of the Three Imposters and the Problem of the Enlightenment* (1997), pp. 3–42. See Berti et al., ed., *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early-Eighteenth-Century Europe: Studies on the Traité des Trois Imposteurs* (1996), and Minois, *The Atheist's Bible: The Most Dangerous Book That Never Existed* (2012).

28 Anderson, *The Treatise of the Three Imposters and the Problem of the Enlightenment* (1997), pp. 12–13.

29 Anon., *La Vie et l'Esprit de Mr. Benoît de Spinosa* (1719). Anon., *Le "Traité des trois imposteurs" et "L'esprit de Spinosa": philosophie clandestine entre 1678 et 1768* (1999). See Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729* (2016), chap. 5, and Berti, "The First Edition of the Traité des trois imposteurs, and its debt to Spinoza's Ethics" (1992).

30 Toland, *Pantheisticon* (1751), pp. 16–17. See Berman, "Disclaimers in Blount and Toland" (1992), and Dagron, "Toland and the Censorship of Atheism" (2009).

31 Berkeley, *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher, in Focus* (1993). See Walmsley, *The Rhetoric of Berkeley's Philosophy* (1990).

32 On Newton see Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism: British Natural Philosophy in an Age of Reason* (1970); Guicciardini, *Reading the Principia: The Debate on Newton's Mathematical Methods for Natural Philosophy From 1687 to 1736* (1999); Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1984); and Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England: Theology, Politics, and Newtonian Public Science* (2009). On vitalism and the world soul,

consult Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (2005); Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (2006); Gaukroger, *The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1680–1760* (2010); and Vassányi, *Anima Mundi: The Rise of the World Soul Theory in Modern German Philosophy* (2010). Herder, *God: Some Conversations* (1940). Goethe, *The Essential Goethe* (2016). Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (2004).

33 Readers can begin with these texts. On medieval thinking, see Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (1936). On Romanticism, see Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (2002). On theosophy, see Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism* (2000). On integral philosophy, see Wilber, *A Theory of Everything* (2000).

34 Williams, *Hegel on the Proofs and Personhood of God* (2017). "Panentheism and Peirce's God: Theology Guided by Philosophy and Cosmology" (2016). Dewey, *A Common Faith* (1934). Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (1929).

35 Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (1984); Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (1988); Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780–1830* (1999); Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief: Atheists and Agnostics in English Society 1850–1960* (1977); Royle, *Radicals, Secularists, and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866–1915* (1980); and Lane, *The Age of Doubt: Tracing the Roots of Our Religious Uncertainty* (2011). On America, see Marty, *Infidel: Freethought and the American Religion* (1961); Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (1985); and Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (2004).

36 See La Mettrie, *Man a Machine and Man a Plant* (1994), and Kathleen *La Mettrie: Medicine, Philosophy, and Enlightenment* (1992). On Naigeon, see Kors, "The Atheism of D'Holbach and Naigeon" (1992). The complete English translation is D'Holbach, *The System of Nature* (1889). Curren traces the French impact of D'Holbach in *Atheism, Religion and Enlightenment in Pre-Revolutionary Europe* (2011). See also Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750–1790* (2011).

37 On evolution and religion, the reader may begin with Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life* (2010), and Pleins, *The Evolving God: Charles Darwin on the Naturalness of Religion* (2013). On Spencer, consult Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (2014).

38 Consult Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (1977). On Mach, see Banks, *Ernst Mach's World Elements: A Study in Natural Philosophy* (2003). On French materialism, see Hecht, *The End of the Soul: Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France* (2005).

39 During the 1990s, dismissively labeling anything involving spiritualism, eastern thought, and/or magical superstition as "woo woo" became common among self-appointed pro-science skeptics. The word probably arose from the sound one is supposed to make to accompany the appearance of a ghost or similarly spooky thing. New Agers may have applied it to their own crowd during the 1970s in popular slang. By 1983, jazz musician George Winston could use the word with familiarity in an interview in *New Age Journal* (now titled *Whole Living*). He understood his audience, he explained, mentioning fans of classical and jazz music alongside "all the woo-woos," adding that "there's real New Age stuff that has substance, and then there's the woo-woo." Entirely by coincidence, the traditional Chinese word 'Wu' was applied to spiritual healers

wielding magical and shamanic powers. On the secularization of magic, see During, *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (2002).

40 Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study* (2016).

41 See Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the 'Academica' in the Renaissance* (1972), and Terence Penelham, "Skepticism and Fideism" (1983).

42 See Curley, "Skepticism and Toleration: The Case of Montaigne" (2005), and Popkin's influential chapter on Montaigne in *The History of Scepticism From Savonarola to Bayle* (2003). Hartle balances Montaigne's humanistic ethos against his skepticism, viewing Montaigne's faith as humbly chastened by doubt, in "Montaigne and Skepticism" (2005). Also consult Vázquez, *The Skepticism of Michel de Montaigne* (2015). On skepticism in French thought, consult Laursen, *The Politics of Skepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume, and Kant* (1992), and Kors, "Skepticism and the Problem of Atheism in Early-Modern France" (1993).

43 On Charron, see Gregory, "Charron's 'Scandalous Book'" (1992). See also Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (2002); Sinnott-Armstrong, ed., *Pyrrhonian Skepticism* (2004); and Neto, *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-Century French Philosophy: The Charronian Legacy 1601–1662* (2015).

44 On Mersenne, see Clarke, *French Philosophy, 1572–1675* (2016), chaps. 2 and 3.

45 Bodin, *Colloquium of the Seven About Secrets of the Sublime* (1975), p. 55, 66. On Bodin, see Blair, *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (2017). Malebranche, *Conversations chrétiennes* (2010), pp. 134–135. See Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729: The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (1990), chap. 11, and Alan Charles Kors *Naturalism and Unbelief in France, 1650–1729* (2016), chap. 4.

46 See Penelhum, *God and Skepticism: A Study in Skepticism and Fideism* (1983), and Neto, *The Christianization of Pyrrhonism: Scepticism and Faith in Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Shestov* (1995).

47 Descartes's relationship with skepticism is too complex to outline here. Consult Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (1978); Fine, "Descartes and Ancient Skepticism: Reheated Cabbage?" (2000); and Lennon, *The Plain Truth: Descartes, Huet, and Skepticism* (2008). On theological and atheological controversies over Cartesianism, see Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729: The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (1990), chaps. 8–10, and Kors, *Naturalism and Unbelief in France, 1650–1729* (2016), chap. 3.

48 On Bayle's skepticism, see Lennon, *Reading Bayle* (1999); Mori, *Bayle: Philosophe* (1999); Popkin, *The History of Scepticism From Savonarola to Bayle* (2003); and Ryan, *Pierre Bayle's Cartesian Metaphysics: Rediscovering Early Modern Philosophy* (2009).

49 On Meslier, the complete English translation is *Testament: Memoir of the Thoughts and Sentiments of Jean Meslier* (2009). See Benítez, *Les yeux de la raison. Le matérialisme athée de Jean Meslier* (2012). On Voltaire, see Beeson and Cronk, "Voltaire: Philosopher or Philosophe" (2009).

50 Tunstall, *Blindness and Enlightenment, An Essay: With a New Translation of Diderot's "Letter on the Blind" and La Mothe Le Vayer's "Of a Man Born Blind"* (2011). Diderot, "Le Rêve de d'Alembert" (1975). On Diderot, see Brewer, *The Discourse of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century France: Diderot and the Art of Philosophizing* (1993); Blom, *A Wicked Company: The Forgotten Radicalism of the European Enlightenment* (2010); and Fowler, ed., *New Essays on Diderot* (2011). On philosophy and toleration during this period, see Levine, ed., *Early Modern Skepticism and the Origins of Toleration* (1999), and Laursen and Villaverde, ed., *Paradoxes of Religious Toleration in Early Modern Political Thought* (2012).

51 See Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (1974); Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth and the History of Nations From Hooke to Vico* (1984); Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (2011); and Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (2011). The German tradition of biblical criticism may have culminated in Germany's counterpart to Mersenne, when Rudolf Bultmann judged in his book *Neues Testament und Mythologie* (1941) that the Bible cannot stand up to tests of history, so faith alone in Christ's message is all Christians require. See Bultmann et al., *Kerygma and Myth* (1953). On contemporary Biblical interpretation, consult discussions in Funk, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (1993); Barton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (1998); BeDuhn, *Truth in Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament* (2003); and Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (2005). Concerning other religious scriptures, see for example Worthington, *Principles of Akkadian Textual Criticism* (2012); Warraq, ed., *What the Koran Really Says: Language, Text, and Commentary* (2002); Frazier, ed., *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies* (2011); and Berkwitz et al., ed., *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art* (2008).

52 Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings* (2007), p. 15. See Lemmens, "Hume's Atheistic Agenda: Philo's Confession in *Dialogues*, 12" (2012). Also consult Mounce, *Hume's Naturalism* (1999); O'Connor, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Hume on Religion* (2001), and Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion* (2010). Natural religion and natural theology presented shifting targets for skepticism before and after Hume; consult Peterfreund, *Turning Points in Natural Theology From Bacon to Darwin* (2012).

53 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998), starting at A583/B611, pp. 559–589. In his lectures on religion, Kant admitted that 'skeptical' atheists take a sound metaphysical position, while denying that 'dogmatic' atheists have the right to deny to others the concept of God. Like earlier French skeptics such as Montainge, Kant held that the agnostic can live the moral life through personal convictions about divine love, righteousness, and providence. See Denis, "Kant's Criticisms of Atheism" (2003). The chapter on Moral atheology considers the Kantian moral argument for theism.

54 See for example van der Zande and Popkin, ed., *The Skeptical Tradition Around 1800: Skepticism in Philosophy, Science, and Society* (1998); Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism* (1989); Yeo, *Defining Science: William Whewell, Natural Knowledge and Public Debate in Early Victorian Britain* (2003); and Forster, *Peirce and the Threat of Nominalism* (2011). Also consult Reidy, *The Age of Scientific Naturalism: Tyndall and His Contemporaries* (2015).

55 Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (1885), p. 242. Consult Rosen, *Mill* (2013), chap. 12.

56 Huxley, "Agnosticism" (1889), p. 43. See Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism: Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge* (1987), and Le Poidevin, *Agnosticism: A Very Short Introduction* (2010).

57 Russell, *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* (1997), pp. 91–92. See also Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (1957).

58 Besides the English translation of *Church Dogmatics*, one may consult a briefer volume with a new translation, Barth, *The Word of God and Theology* (2011). Consult Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology Without*

Weapons (2000). Bultmann's quotation is in "New Testament and Mythology" (1961), p. 15. See also Bultmann, *Interpreting the Faith for the Modern Era* (1987). Tillich's quotations are in *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (1957), pp. 6, 7. See Leiner, "Tillich on God" (2008). On twentieth century Protestant theology, also consult Dorrien, *The Word as True Myth: Interpreting Modern Theology* (1997).

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7 Rationalist Atheology

Skeptically reasoning that theological arguments for god fail to make their case is one way of leaving supernaturalism in an implausible condition. Rationalist atheology specifically appeals to logical standards to point out how unreasonable many arguments for supernaturalism can be. This method was vital to atheology's origins and long development, but it has not been systematized. Logical rules, derivable from the principle of sufficient reason, can reveal where arguments for god contravene rationality by perpetuating mysteries, contradictions, vicious circularities, false dichotomies, and the like.

What violates basic rationality cannot be explanatory in any sensible manner. Unreasonable wish-fulfillment about unnatural matters can seem explanatory enough to religious believers, to be sure. Nevertheless, what happens to strike people as best or fitting is not automatically explanatory. Theological arguments depicting a supernatural god as the better explanation—for humans, the earth, the universe, or whatever gods are supposed to explain—do not merit evaluations of explanatory power if they are illogical and non-explanatory. In order to deserve comparison with a nonreligious explanation, an appeal to the supernatural must at least be intellectually explanatory, which Rationalist atheology is designed to strongly doubt.

In this chapter, several major arguments for god are analyzed and critiqued using seven logical rules of rationality, illustrating how to apply this re-organized Rationalist atheology.[1] Another set of arguments from natural theology calling for rebuttal from science's knowledge are examined by Scientific atheology in the next chapter.

Atheism and Skepticism

Familiarity with forms of reasoning, such as types of inference and forms of argumentation, or even a self-reflective awareness about how well or poorly one is reasoning, is by no means evenly distributed across humanity. Nevertheless, basic reasoning capabilities inherent to common sense are thoroughly human. Some theologians have tried to tell many millions of nonreligious people that they do not think clearly because their intellectual

faculties are impaired due to sin, a condition only reparable by a "divine sense" or divine grace. That view begs the question of god's reality. Complaining that atheism presumes naturalism to explain human reasoning is also fallacious, since the meaning of atheism is not something like "everything about humanity is naturalistically explained." Mistaking atheism for naturalism is not entirely theology's confusion, but Rationalist atheology is innocent of that charge.[2]

Rationalist atheology acknowledges the obvious fact that most adults around the world display the capacity for basic common sense inference and simple reasoning. On that basis, Rationalist atheology mounts its reasonable rejections of god-belief. Theological complaints that no naturalistic account of intelligence could explain knowledge of axiomatic and theoretical truths, or account for indefeasible knowledge of a strict sort, are handled by complete atheology, which is beyond the scope of this book. The theological argument that the heights of human rationality are best explained by god's creation of humans is handled by Rationalist atheology's response to arguments from design, discussed below. In any case, those theological maneuvers do not touch the basic thinking capacities to which Rationalist atheology appeals.[3]

The idea that something cannot come from nothing can find expression in the "principle of sufficient reason": roughly, for any object or event, there must be some reason why it exists. Theological support for a supernatural deity frequently invokes, openly or tacitly, this intuitive demand for sufficient reason. Over the centuries, different formulations for the principle of sufficient reason have enjoyed currency in philosophical, theological, and scientific discourses. Nothing so sophisticated is required for Rationalist atheology, so no effort to adjudicate among versions of sufficient reason is undertaken here.

Atheology would be wise for prioritizing the basic idea of sufficient reason. First, while respect for sufficient reason is essential to skepticism and science, it has always been central to human rationality and sound intelligence. As a regulative heuristic—it may not be 'innate' or a priori—its role as a guide cannot prevent people from inconsistently applying it, or simply ignoring it. Our human weaknesses are no excuse, however. Religions requiring violations of sufficient reason should be criticized for abandoning something crucial for intelligence. Second, supernatural theologies frequently rely on sufficient reason, so their violations of sufficient reason erode their plausibility from within. Theologies appealing to sufficient reason in their justifications for god-belief must be unreasonable if those justifications violate sufficient reason. Third, theologies sometimes argue that their superiority over atheism and naturalism is due to an abiding respect for sufficient reason which nonreligious worldviews lack. That superiority disappears where supernaturalism is implicated in the violation or abandonment of sufficient reason. Fourth, atheology maintains its neutral ground by prioritizing sufficient reason, for atheology does not presume naturalism, and it expects any naturalism to be held to the same standard of sufficient reason.

Sufficient Reason

The principle of sufficient reason has no single definitive formulation. The basic idea appears to be that the way things are require some sort of explanation for why they are that way instead of some other way. Without worrying over identifying the "correct" formulation (philosophers do not agree, in any case), here are some examples of what this principle has stood for:

> An event must have a prior cause.
>
> The origin of a thing is due to something else.
>
> Something contingent (it did not necessarily have to exist) must be the responsibility of something else.
>
> Something cannot come from nothing.

Ways of expressing the principle of sufficient reason can sound like they are trying to say similar things, and further examples illustrate that commonality. Simple permanent stability and absence of change appears to require no explanation or reason; by contrast, something must be responsible for matters that could be different from what they are. Where an object happens to exist here and now, we can ask why is there this thing here rather than other things instead. When one event happens rather than another, there must be a reason why, something that made enough of a difference. An entity coming into existence must arise from something else, or from several other things, capable of contributing to its emergence. If an object happens to come into existence or undergo modification, something internal or external must be responsible for that change. Any difference or change must happen from some 'be-cause'. Intelligence expects continuities between the immediate past, what is happening presently, and what will happen next.[4] And this list could get longer, but these examples illustrate what sufficient reason typically expects. Neither the world nor our intelligence can guarantee ideal conformity to these expectations, but rationality seeks conformity all the same.

Sufficient reason covers change and contingency: something changing needs sufficient reason to be changing, and something that could have been otherwise needs sufficient explanation to be the way that it is. What about special sorts of things than never change, or necessarily have to be? If there are uncreated, unchanging, or necessary things (possessing one feature may imply the others), then the rules of sufficient reason would not apply to them. Specifically, the sorts of things that do not needs reasons for why they are the way they are would not be events, would never change, would not exist in time, and cannot be dependent on anything else. Such things are instead categorized under various labels, such as "timeless," "eternal," "necessary," "absolute," and "self-sufficient." These things cannot have

explanations, because they have to exist. If it is impossible to deny their existence, then there is no need to explain them by appealing to something else—nothing else could possibly create them or help them to exist, and they cannot depend on anything else in any way. Only such necessary and self-sufficient things (if any such things are real) could theoretically be exempt from these positive rules of reason.

In principle, atheism is entirely compatible with necessary being. Necessary being does not have to be supernatural. Most any worldview could include necessary being except for the most nominalistic or positivistic philosophy. No worldview is compelled to regard any necessary being as godly or divine, including naturalism (since nature itself might count as necessary being). Theology is equally at liberty to label a necessary being as 'god', but pleasing labels are not refutations of atheism. Whether something supernatural is consistent with sufficient reason is the real issue, one that cannot be resolved by arbitrary notions of 'natural' or 'supernatural'. Theology must go to the trouble of establishing that something supernaturally necessary is real, which requires sound reasoning and respect for sufficient reason.

The principle of sufficient reason in its positive formulations, such as the rules mentioned already, demand explanatory relations and connections between things: correlations of change with other changes, relationships between causes and their effects, developments of objects from other objects, and so forth. Just as the principle of sufficient reason has its positive side—"Seek reasons for things!"—it has a negative side: "There is no reason to accept mystery as an explanation!" This negative side of sufficient reason detects when insufficient reason has been given, and mystery must be the ultimate sort of insufficient reason. Mystery itself does not violate reason, since it is reasonable to notice when we encounter the unknown and chart it as mysterious. Honest rationality cannot be satisfied by pretending that mystery explains anything. A genuine explanation should decrease mystery and confusion, not increase them.

This reasonable demand for genuine explanations can be elaborated into specific rules. Seven 'negative' rules can be formulated to point out the fair boundaries to reasonable explanation:

1. Do not accept mere mystery: Reject an "explanation" that just puts a label on something beyond human conceptualization or comprehension.
2. Do not accept contradiction: Reject an "explanation" that requires a logical contradiction, since that creates another mystery.
3. Do not accept repetition: Reject an "explanation" that requires the prior truth of the explanation, since that repeats the mystery.
4. Do not accept mysterious causes: Reject a "explanatory" causal relationship between two things that have absolutely nothing in common, since that creates another mystery.
5. Do not accept absent justification: Reject an "explanation" where an offered reason cannot provide genuine support since it is irrelevant or unjustified, leaving only mystery.

6. Do not accept arbitrary justification: Reject an "explanation" where reasons given in its support can equally support rival explanations, since that leaves more mystery.
7. Do not permit unjustified exemptions: Reject an "explanation" that requires special exemption from a rational principle used to support the explanation, since that only increases mystery.

To illustrate what violations of these seven rules look like, suppose that someone wants to justify convicting a woman of being a witch.

Violate Rule 1: She seems mysterious, so she must be a witch.
Violate Rule 2: It is impossible to tell clever witches from ordinary people, and she looks ordinary, so we can tell that she must be a witch.
Violate Rule 3: Ordinary people do not place illness curses on other people, but she did, so she must be a witch.
Violate Rule 4: She was born on the coldest night of the year, so she must be a witch.
Violate Rule 5: Every town suffers from a witch (do not ask us why), so she must be a witch.
Violate Rule 6: Children in the town have died from the same illness, so she must be witch.
Violate Rule 7: Unfortunate events always have unfortunate earthly causes, yet assuming that earthly misfortunes could just keep on happening by themselves seems inconceivable, so a demonic power causes some earthly events, and therefore she must be a witch.

More sophisticated logical rules and fallacies emerge from these basic rules of reason. For example, Rule 2 calls for the logical rule that a proposition and its negation cannot both be true at the same time, Rule 3 is the idea behind logical rules forbidding the fallacies of begging the question and circular reasoning, and Rule 6 accounts for the fallacy of assuming a false dichotomy.

These negative rules of reason suffice for exposing violations of basic rationality by central arguments for a supernatural god: Mystery arguments, Ontological arguments, Creation arguments, Design arguments, and Revelation arguments. A trained theologian could rightly point out where skeptical tactics recounted in this chapter do not yet address sophisticated variations of these arguments. However, any variation can be addressed and refuted by skeptical counter-arguments developed from these tactics of Rationalist atheology.

Mystery Arguments

Mystery arguments basically propose that since deep mystery is encountered, it is reasonable to believe in god. Rational atheology makes several objections. Calling a mystery "god" is not an explanation of a mystery

(violating Rule 1). Furthermore, just because you accept the existence of mystery does not mean you accept the reality of god. The supernaturalist cannot argue that anyone who accepted the reality of mystery beyond knowledge automatically admits the reality of god. Precisely because everyone admits the deep mystery, no one can claim to know that a god is out there with the mystery without contradiction (violating Rule 2). It does not help to assign superlatives to this mystery and then proclaim that god has been discerned. An age-old fallacious argument says, "The deep mystery around us is infinite, but god is infinite, so god is real." Projecting an idea of god onto deep mystery in order to see a deity reflecting back at you does not really reduce mystery. Also, the supernaturalist would have to prove that this mystery does not consist of just more unexplored nature. If the supernaturalist argues that an endlessly advancing science encounters only more mystery so a god must exist beyond nature, this argument violates Rule 6, since science's continually advancing knowledge also supports the idea that only more nature still lies beyond knowledge, so we instead reach a skeptical standoff between naturalism and supernaturalism.

It cannot help the supernaturalist to argue that it must be a supernatural god out there in the mystery on the grounds that a god is the simplest explanation. This theological argument at least respects reason. Using god to attempt to construct an explanation is not a problem in itself, and simpler explanations should be preferred, all other things being equal. Between two explanations that can enjoy the same support from evidence, with all other things equal, it is reasonable to prefer the simpler explanation (this axiom is a variant of Rule 6). The criteria for "simplest explanation" in the supernaturalist's argument here must be a principle that a simple explanation adds the fewest things in the explanation. Adding just one god to nature does sound pretty simple, but naturalism is even simpler than supernaturalism, since it proposes that there is only more nature out there in the mystery, hence adding nothing to nature. Nature plus a supernatural god cannot be a simpler explanation than just plenty of endless nature. The theological rejoinder that nature cannot be enough by itself proceeds into the ontological argument for god, the topic of the next section.

Theological arguments for god that predefine god as the unconditioned ground of all being must either collapse into the mystery argument for god, mutate into the ontological argument for god (refuted in the next section), or inflate into naturalism. Theologians emphasizing the absolute inconceivability of this unconditioned ground to reality leave this "god" lost in utter mystery, without any reasonable basis for crediting this god with causing, sustaining, infusing, or emanating anything else. To permit this empty god to still have some sort of responsibility for reality, theology must establish that reality requires this god without god being part of reality itself, so an argument for a necessary god is required and the ontological argument proceeds from there. On the other hand, if some barely conceivable causal

relationship between this ground of being and the rest of reality has some explanatory utility, then the ground of being and ordinary being are interconnected, so this ground is not so supernatural after all, and naturalism has the option of adopting this ground as part of the natural realm. In the absence of a successful mystery argument or ontological argument for god, theology is powerless to object to naturalism's adoption of any ground of being as part of the ultimate level to nature.

Rationality can recognize how the mind encounters serious mystery, but that is quite different from unreasonably attempting to discern anything divine (or anything else) within that mystery.[5]

Ontological Arguments

An ontological argument for god proposes that one highly specific god must be real—that god which is conceived as having some sort of essential characteristic for necessarily existing. Denial of this specific god is supposed to violate reason, according to this kind of argument, so the only rational course would be to accept the truth that this god is real. Different versions of this argument select distinctive characteristics, but they all basically argue that the possession of this characteristic makes the reality of this god necessary and undeniable. Quite different arguments, relying on no characterizations to god and using modal logic alone, also have been labeled as ontological arguments, but few theologians attempt them and even fewer theologians rest god-belief on them.[6]

Selecting "reality" or "necessary existence" or "not a contingent being" as the essential characteristic obviously violates Rule 3 by begging the question and assuming the very thing to be proven. That is why ontological arguments select other characteristics (maximal greatness, perfection, and the like) to attempt to show how such a god must be real. Philosophers and theologians sharply disagree amongst each other over whether these sorts of purely conceptual and logical arguments ever demonstrate that something must actually have a reality anywhere. We cannot settle that issue here, although atheism is hardly refuted if being itself must be conceived as real rather than unreal. Arguments establishing more than nature's eternality or pantheism's plausibility are needed, so atheology instead ponders the narrower issue of whether anything supernatural could be proven to be real in this manner.

Suppose that a successful ontological argument specifying some essential characteristic (label it 'C') demonstrated the existence of one necessarily existing thing (call it 'G'). If C is "supernatural" then this argument concerns the existence of one supernatural G, but no successful argument would actually use "supernatural" since there is nothing in the concept of "supernatural" permitting an inference towards "necessary." The term "supernatural" could be redefined as "having no contingencies" on the grounds that the "natural" only consists of contingent things, but this strategy violates Rule

6 (why must nature arbitrarily contain only contingent things when, for all we know, the supernatural could contain contingencies too?) and also Rule 3 (defining "supernatural" as "not contingent" forces an ontological argument to beg the question).

On the other hand, if characteristic C does not mean "supernatural" then an additional argument, after the ontological argument, is needed to show why C implies "supernatural." But what would that additional argument look like? "Greatness" does not logically confirm "supernatural," nor does "perfection." None of the typical ontological arguments use a C that guarantees that G must be supernatural. For all we know, the greatest, maximal, perfect, or self-sufficient being could be all of natural being, or some core feature or component to nature, or some portion of nature uninteresting to religion. A theology violates Rule 6 if it tries to arbitrarily explain that only by being supernatural could something achieve necessity and self-sufficiency. A theology violates Rule 3 if it tries to presumptively explain that a god would ensure that believers can comprehend what the supernatural is. Religions may denigrate nature and refuse to see anything divine in the worldly realm just because it is worldly (violating Rule 5), but this convenient presumption against nature is prejudicial, not rational. Just because some religions are unwilling to regard nature as worthy does not assist an ontological argument demonstrate that something supernatural must be real.

An interesting variation on the ontological argument for god begins by claiming that a person can possess and comprehend the concept of a perfect being. It must first be proven that a person can truly possess and comprehend the concept of a perfect being. Since thinking about one's idea of a perfect being is not the same thing as thinking about the perfect idea of a perfect being, such proof is impossible. Merely putting words together does not guarantee the full possession of a concept, including "an infinite being." If I say, "I have an idea of the distance between the earth and the sun," that hardly means that I am successfully conceiving that entire distance. Trying to fully comprehend any sort of immensity or perfection generates only mystery (violating Rule 1). Presuming that god would ensure the innate possession of an adequate conception of god violates Rule 3, and trying to account for a way that god could implant a perfect idea in people's finite minds violates Rule 4. Asserting that the very inadequacy of an idea of a perfect god is a good sign that it is indeed of a perfect god is a violation of Rule 5. Arguing that an inadequate idea of god can only be delivered from a perfect god violates Rule 6 (since worldly inspirations could be responsible instead). Furthermore, people do not agree on what they specifically have in mind when they think of perfection. Christian theology had to categorically define a small set of perfections for god just to get Christians focused properly, which assumes what is to be proven (violating Rule 3) or relies on a suspiciously arbitrary method favorable to just Christianity (violating Rule 6). Also, even a careful list of things such as omniscience, omnipotence,

and benevolence generate conceptual contradictions when a single entity is imagined as possessing all of them (violating Rule 2).[7]

Descartes's arguments for god's existence in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) deserve further comment. Such arguments for a philosopher's god—supremely perfect being—at most prove (if Kantian objections could be surmounted) that conceiving being perfectly is the same thought as conceiving of being as real. No other conception of this being follows necessarily, such as being having the attribute of goodness or the power of knowing everything. Descartes labels supremely perfect being as "God" but only unprovable connotations and religious prejudgments seem to follow from that naming preference. The question is not whether (for example) omniscience entails omnipotence, but instead whether every human being must innately know that perfection includes omniscience, or beneficence. A Cartesian can claim that Hindu, Buddhist, or Taoist notions of supreme reality, where they differ from Christian notions of God, fail to fully conceive perfection. Yet that is not a provable claim by Cartesian standards of knowledge, no matter how often Descartes asserts that he clearly and distinctly thinks about what his God is like. Atheism is not refuted by Descartes, because nothing proven by his arguments (if anything really is proven) turns out to be something that atheism must deny. Atheism is compatible with the philosophical position that being rather than nothing necessarily exists, and that "perfection" honorific adds nothing concrete.

A successful argument that a necessary and self-sufficient being cannot be natural, and not amount to just nature itself, would require theology to directly deal with what it means to be natural, and figure out whether evidence from the natural world can assist with understanding anything about the supernatural. Theological arguments about creation go in that direction. Ontological arguments for something supernatural fail to survive tests against standards of reason.

Creation Arguments

The supernaturalist believes that a supernatural god created nature. "Nature" here refers not just to our small world or vast universe, but to everything natural that may exist (inclusive of quantum-level matters and multiple universes, and so on). Simplistic creation arguments equate our universe with nature, ask how anyone can imagine that nature did not have a cause, and then add that nature cannot cause itself, in order to conclude that something besides nature is responsible. But nature should not be equated with just our universe, since that begs the question against the possibility that more nature is responsible for our universe. A creation argument for a supernatural god should instead try to infer the existence of a supernatural god from the existence of all possible nature.

There is no argumentative short-cut from the premises (1) the principle of sufficient reason and (2) the fact that our universe is extended in space/

time to conclude that a supernatural deity must be real. Theologians still offer that short-cut with more rhetorical flourish than sound logic. William Lane Craig and James Sinclair reach the climax of their essay on the "The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument" (2009, 190) by saying, "From the two premises, it follows logically that the universe has a cause. This is a staggering conclusion, for it implies that the universe was brought into existence by a transcendent reality." Atheology is not staggering, since the word "transcendent" is ambiguous. Craig and Sinclair want their readers to hear "supernatural" but at most the conclusion warrants "beyond this universe." More nature could be responsible just the same. There is probably plenty more nature beyond the horizon of the observable universe, and perhaps there is more nature before our universe's beginning. Labeling whatever may have been responsible for a universe as "transcendent" or "God" or the "First Cause" is at most suggestive of nature worship or pantheism, until some proof is produced to show that such a being is indeed supernatural. Attempted demonstrations of an unnatural Creator fail to satisfy the rules of reason.

Creation theology requires a supernatural deity. The reasonable demand for explanation would call for an explanation for god's reality (yet another higher god?) and so on, so theology expects a special exemption for god from such explanation (violating Rule 7). Supernaturalist theology can try to define god as precisely that unique thing which has no characteristics calling for further explanation. However, defining a god is not the same thing as proving its reality. This supernaturalist definition for god is simply a convenient way to distract the issue towards nature, which allegedly needs an explanation for existing in a way that god should not. This distraction cannot divert logic, however. The supernaturalist must first prove that nature as a whole requires explanation, before producing a conveniently unexplainable god to supply that explanation.[8]

This creation argument therefore depends on the supernaturalist first proving that nothing about nature is timeless, necessary, or self-sufficient. How could the supernaturalist establish this? Why nature as whole must be as contingent or dependent as any of its parts is a question left unexplained by theology, violating Rule 4. Cosmology has not supplied a definite answer one way or the other, and theology has no resources of its own to determine the answer either. Although individual things within nature do exist in time, have origins, and are not self-sufficient, nature as a whole may not have the same properties. Twentieth-century theology fixated on the Big Bang start to our universe, but supernaturalism did not automatically become plausible. Although the Big Bang theory has cosmology's confidence, Rationalist atheology is prepared for all contingencies, even a return to a steady-state scenario. If the Big Bang theory continues to be a cornerstone of cosmology, scientific explanations involving more nature besides our universe may become confirmable in the future. Science has no firm conclusions, but theology has no way to confirm matters either. For all we know, nature as a

whole may not be an event, and nature could be infinitely old. Nature may have had no beginning and no external cause, and supernaturalism cannot simply assume otherwise. Unless it can be first proven that nature as a whole is the sort of thing requiring an explanation, the creation argument for a supernatural god cannot get started.

A much-discussed version of the *Kalam* cosmological argument reasons that since it is impossible to imagine how an infinitely prolonged nature could really exist, therefore nature cannot actually be infinite in duration. This argument can seem plausible, but any line of thinking involving infinity must be handled carefully. A definition of infinity requires that conceiving its completion must be humanly impossible; if conceiving such a completion were possible, infinity is not involved. Mathematics is well aware of the many paradoxical consequences that arise from fitting infinity to intuitive expectations. This theological argument against actual infinities therefore misuses the concept of infinity. Our human inability to conceive nature having an infinite duration cannot guarantee that nature does not really have an infinite duration. For all we can understand, if nature really is actually infinite in duration, we should not be able to fully conceive that infinity. Our failure of imagination is logically and realistically compatible with both alternatives: nature is finite, and nature is infinite. Presuming that the human inability to conceive nature's infinite duration can only be compatible with nature's finitude not only ignores mathematics, but also violates Rule 6.[9]

Theology can try to argue that even a thing of infinite extent is something which does not have to necessarily exist. If not, the argument continues, then an explanation is required for nature's existence as a whole, since absolutely nothing could have been the case instead, and theology offers a supernatural god to be that explanation. This argument must first lend some credibility to the idea that nature might not have existed. The presumption here is that absolute "nothingness" can be conceived, so "somethingness" can be conceived as a possibility, leaving existence as something that requires an explanation. This tactic violates Rule 1, since conceiving absolute nothingness is not possible for the human imagination, and the attempt at most yields a sense of mystery, not something ready for an intelligible contrast with existence. Even if conceiving of absolute nothingness were possible, this theological tactic violates Rule 2 or Rule 7. This tactic relies on the principle that when we are confronted with a stark choice between conceiving something existing and conceiving nothing existing, some explanation is required for why such absolute nothingness prevails instead of actual existence. The supernaturalist offers the existence of god as the explanation for the difference: god created nature and hence prevented absolute nothingness. However, if god must be conceived as existing in this situation of absolute nothingness, Rule 2 is violated. Why should god be real, instead of just absolute nothingness, since that absolute nothingness remains conceivable? Applying the same principle again, we see how something is needed to explain why god is real rather than absolute nothingness, and so something

else besides god must be involved. An infinite regress looms: no matter what is postulated to explain what is real, that very thing requires an additional explanation for its reality, and so on. When the supernaturalist tries to halt this infinite regress of non-explanation by saying that "god is the one exception to the principle that a real thing requires an explanation for being real instead of absolute nothingness," then Rule 7 is violated. In summary, the conceivable alternative to supernaturalism cannot be eliminated: nature itself may be the one absolutely real thing requiring no further explanation.

The argument for a First Cause, even if it could surmount the above objections, would at most show that there is a ontologically fundamental kind of being that requires no further explanation. A First Cause is not supernatural unless it is first presumed that nature cannot encompass this First Cause. A theological argument that nature and the First Cause are not only discriminable but separable is needed here, and such an argument would have to first unreasonably assume that nature must by definition lack necessary and/or self-explanatory being. For example, defining nature as "what is changing" or "what is moving" only begs the entire question, as has been pointed out already. If theology could resign itself to labeling an entirely natural "first cause" as "god" just because it enjoys supreme ontological priority (if such a thing survives testing against all logical rules), atheology has run out of objections, because nature worship is not supernaturalism and does not contradict atheism. Atheology would raise objections to ad hoc additions to a first cause such as sentience, agency, personhood, and so on.[10]

Although supernaturalism cannot get the creation argument going in the first place because nature may need no explanation, adding a supernatural god to explain nature violates reason in several more ways. Suppose a single supernatural god is postulated as nature's cause. Either this god created nature from itself, or god created it *ex nihilo*, "from nothing." If god created nature out of itself, god would have to create basic natural properties (mass, physical energy, space-time dimensions, etc.) from divinely supernatural characteristics, yet natural and supernatural matters by definition have nothing in common, violating Rule 4. If god is supposed to have created nature from nothing, that notion ends up violating several rules no matter how such a creation is imagined. Simply appealing to creation "from nothing" as if it were self-explanatory, or as if god created without any cause, violates Rule 1. Imagining that god had a causal relationship (or any effective relationship) with nothingness violates Rule 4. Saying that "god's will" or "god's word" created nature does not supply sufficient explanations either, however much they may appeal to the religious imagination. Supposing that a mere "will" or "word" alone, even if divine, has effective powers is a violation of Rule 5. In summary, claiming that a supernatural god created nature from nothing is not the same thing as claiming that divine creation happened for no reason, but that claim only amounts to depicting that special creation as forever mysterious.

Supernaturalism may depict divine creation in humanly comprehensible terms, attributing anthropomorphic characteristics to god to allow divine reasons for creation seem more understandable. However, that depiction results in more violations of reason. For example, if this supernatural god has been real for an infinite amount of time, then the unanswerable question arises about why god waited an infinite amount of time before creating the world (violating Rule 1). On the other hand, if god is timelessly eternal, then there is no point in time when god creates the universe, leaving the universe's origin in time as a mystery (violating Rule 5). Furthermore, if this god is timelessly eternal and created nature in that timeless state, then the origin of nature was caused at no time and in no time (violating Rule 1 and Rule 2). Some theologians have resorted to claiming that instantaneous causes and creations are conceptually possible, but even if they are conceivable, theology must prove that they can be real beyond nature. Perhaps nature supplies examples of instantaneous causation, but they only seem supernatural to those who earnestly want to view them that way. The creation argument must proceed from knowledge about nature, not what one wishes to see despite science. Other theologians have claimed that god switched from an eternal to a temporal status just "in time" to create a temporal world with temporal causes, but proposing that god could enact that switch appeals to more mystery (violating Rule 4 and Rule 5).[11] Thwarted by these rational obstacles, creation theology may admit that divine creation is a mystery never conforming to reason, and atheology can graciously accept that confirmation.

This confirmation of creationism's unreasonableness can be heard in the most unexpected of places. The prominent Christian philosopher Richard Swinburne has insisted upon reasonable religious explanations as much as anyone. His book *The Existence of God* offers demonstrations of god's explanatory power, but resorts to mysteries when necessary. He initially says that a proper explanation of something must include not only what made it happen, but why that cause was able to make it happen. This view of explanation captures the spirit of explanatory reason. However, when Swinburne wants god to ultimately explain the world, explanatory reason is set aside.

> . . . we have an ultimate explanation of some phenomenon E if we can state not merely which factors C and R operated at the time to bring E about, and which contemporaneous factors made C and R exist and operate at that time, and so on until we reach factors for the contemporaneous existence and operation of which there is no explanation; but also state the factors that originally brought C and R about, and which factors originally brought those factors about, and so on until we reach factors for the existence and operation of which there is no explanation.
> (Swinburne 2004, 78–79)

It is unclear whether Swinburne generously permits any belief system, or only theism, to suspend that requirement for reasonable explanation at some stage of explanation where convenient. In any case, it again appears that creationism must abandon rationality.

Creation arguments fail tests of reason. The alternative remains that nature as a whole needs no external explanation, and only more nature can sufficiently explain nature. Theology can turn its attention to processes within nature, to seek signs of divine creativity there.

Design Arguments

A design argument (often labeled as a teleological argument) for god proposes that a creator god is responsible for our universe's structure as understood by natural knowledge. In our modern era, that means trying to account for such things as the universe's particular arrangement of physical laws and energies, the specific way the universe has developed into galaxies of stars and planets, and the emergence of life in its impressive complexity. The design argument hence presumes that anything having some distinctive regular order (and our universe, along with many things within the universe, surely qualifies) is something that calls for a reasonable explanation. Theologies expecting god to explain why natural is amenable to mathematical formulas, or why scientific hypotheses permit good predictions about the future, fall under this category.

This rule that order must exist for some reason or purpose is a variation on the idea of explanatory reason that something contingent must be the responsibility of something else. The more regular order something has, the more it seems dependent on some particular cause for its existence. Something having very little regular order, like a lump of randomly arranged particles none of which are uncommon, strikes us as easily brought together under any number of prior conditions, so that no particular cause, and definitely no intentional cause, is needed to explain it. Something possessing a structure of patterned arrangements to uncommon parts, on the other hand, strikes us as an unusual thing requiring some highly specific sort of cause to bring just that special thing into existence. Things in the world come in degrees of order, so there is a range for explanation, from no particular explanation to specific explanation. The world does not strike us as divided sharply into two categories of things needing explanation and things needing no explanation, because all natural things deserve explanations, as explanatory reason demands. Thanks to the natural and life sciences, we understand how natural processes produce natural things, such as geological processes producing mountains and forests producing new trees. Cosmology describes how stars condensed from the early universe's first atoms and then formed into galaxies, and physics is now describing how the first atoms formed from the earliest particles out of the Big Bang.

As far as theology is concerned, the argument from design attends to natural things possessing an order so highly structured and improbable that no natural process could be responsible, suggesting a supernatural creator. What would those natural things be? We may set aside pseudo-design arguments rejecting sound science (such as the biological evolution of organisms) and weak design arguments supposing that some things in nature will never be explained by science (theology could not know this in advance). Responsible design arguments acknowledge science's impressive powers and only ask whether a some natural matters require an explanation from beyond nature. Retrograde theologies around the world have not relented their attacks on evolution, of course, and creationisms such as Intelligent Design call for scientific and atheological refutation.[12] Scientific atheology dismantles those unscientific belief systems.

Conceding science's growing capacity for explaining matters within the universe, modern theology has turned its attention towards the whole universe itself. This 'universal' design argument for god begins by making two claims: (1) the universe's regular order is so highly structured that it is naturally improbable, and (2) anything naturally improbable requires a supernatural designer rather than just a natural explanation. Rationalist atheology doubts that these claims can reasonably support the reality of a supernatural god. The overall skeptical strategy counter-argues that the first claim is not sufficiently justified by either reason or science (violating Rule 5), and that the second claim is weak because it relies on a principle saying that "order cannot come from disorder," leaving the argument in violation of several rules.

The first theological claim, that the universe is so highly structured that it is naturally improbable, cannot be demonstrated by theology. The naturalistic possibility that our universe originated from a prior universe, or some portion of a prior universe (like a black hole), or some interaction between prior universes, and so on, cannot be ruled out by theology. The fact that science does not yet favor one origin account over another is not relevant here; theology must concede that its universal design argument must firmly assume that no natural origin to our universe is conceivably possible. Yet there are cosmological theories hypothesizing natural origins for universes, and although they are highly speculative at present, there may be no necessary reason why cosmology must forever fail. Unless theology can prove that cosmology must forever fail, so that a supernatural explanation is required, theology cannot conclude that a god is the only sufficient explanation.

A generalized form of a design argument starts from the fact that our universe displays a regular structure, a structure describable (to a high degree) by mathematical tools. Regardless of whether we would ever be able to tell how probable or not this structure happens to be, there is one unquestionable fact: our universe has structure. Why does mathematics apply to the universe at all? This generic design argument judges that the best explanation for structure is a designer god who selected a structure. Presumably the alternatives to our actual universe would either be no universe at all (so this

argument degenerates back to the creation argument), a created universe with no structure (but why would a god bother to create such a useless thing), or an uncreated eternal universe lacking regularity (a universe of sheer chaos) that eventually produced universes with structures. Setting the first two options aside, theology would have to rule out the third option, and also rule out naturalism's fourth option, that universes with structure have always existed, requiring no divine creator. The third option has been contemplated—American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce tried to logically demonstrate its plausibility—and quantum theory already appears to have cosmological implications. Theology cannot rule out the fourth option either, as explained in the previous section. If this generic design argument insists that the only cause for a structured universe is something itself having a structure, the naturalist can agree, and point out that the theist gives no reason (violating Rule 5) for preferring a supernatural creator over a natural creator. The question, "Why does mathematics apply to our universe?" can be answered with the naturalistic option that eternal nature always had structure, and that structure produced the actual structure of our universe through the Big Bang.

A version of the design argument, the "fine-tuning" argument, relies heavily on the second theological claim. It attempts to depict our universe as so improbably ordered that it seems unreasonable to think that prior natural processes could be responsible. This fine-tuning argument points to the delicate arrangement of basic natural laws permitting such things as the universe growing to its present scale, or the universe developing conditions permitting life to arise. Essential to this argument is a premise asserting that any small deviance from these basic laws would forbid the universe from looking the way it does now, or harboring the life we know about. What could ensure that just the "right" physical laws prevail in our universe? Theology proposes that only a supernatural intelligence could have selected and crafted such an otherwise improbable result.[13]

The fine-tuning argument can only proceed from current scientific knowledge about the laws of nature. How much weight can be placed on today's cosmology, a scientific field barely out of its infancy? Any calculations for the "probability" of our universe's laws are highly speculative and quite revisable. Excitement over the improbability attached to the "cosmological constant," for example, presumes that cosmology won't see any paradigm shifts in the future (which is truly unlikely). Scientifically, it may turn out that just about any universe's origin that manages to reach the Big Bang stage would have natural laws roughly similar to ours, so that our universe's laws are more probable than improbable. Logically, it is a misuse of probability to imagine any range of possibilities based on the smallest sample size: just one observable universe. Biologically, for all we know, some types of life presently unknown to us could have arisen even if our universe were considerably different. Our kind of life emerged and evolved in the way that it did in order to survive here—and if the universe had been different, other kinds of life forms might have emerged differently. There may be nothing so special or valuable about our form of life that it requires more than just a scientific account.

What actually lends seeming plausibility to the fine-tuning argument is a human need to feel special and wanted, not our knowledge due to science. To expose that reliance on feelings rather than facts, compare two hypothetical scenarios, which must be hypothetical since we do not know which type of universe we inhabit.

Hypothetical Scenario One:

1. Life is abundant across the universe and intelligent life is also fairly common.
2. If the universe's natural laws were somewhat different, life would be much less common.
3. Only a particular range of natural laws (near this universe's laws) ensure that life is so prevalent.
4. This universe's natural laws could have all been different from what they actually are.
5. Either (a) there are many universes with randomly arranged laws, or (b) our universe's laws were set by one supreme natural law, or (c) an unnatural mind dictated the universe's laws.
6. It is unknown whether there are any other universes.
7. It is unknown whether one supreme natural law controls all other natural laws of the universe.
8. Only a supernatural mind that cares about life can explain why our universe is so hospitable for life.

Therefore, an unnatural mind dictated the universe's laws.

Hypothetical Scenario Two:

1. Life is scarce across the universe and intelligent life is extremely rare.
2. If the universe's natural laws were somewhat different, life would be practically impossible.
3. Only a particular range of natural laws (near this universe's laws) ensure that life is possible at all.
4. This universe's natural laws could have all been different from what they actually are.
5. Either (a) there are many universes with randomly arranged laws, or (b) our universe's laws were set by one supreme natural law, or (c) an unnatural mind dictated the universe's laws.
6. It is unknown whether there are any other universes.
7. It is unknown whether one supreme natural law controls all other natural laws of the universe.
8. Only a supernatural mind that cares about life can explain why our universe permits any life at all.

Therefore, an unnatural mind dictated the universe's laws.

The key premises shared by both arguments are easily placed in doubt. We have already pointed out how premises 2, 3, and 4 cannot be accepted due to inadequate scientific knowledge. We have also noticed that premise 8 cannot follow from 6 and 7 because the rules of reason say that ignorance and mystery about the universe cannot yield knowledge of the supernatural. Even if those problems were set aside, premise 8 is highly questionable in its own right because improbable facts do not have to be explained by a friendly familiar face. The plausibility that religious people like to attach to premise 8 springs from the same cognitive-affective bias that tells people who win the lottery that god intended for them to win the lottery. If these considerations are still not enough to deflate the fine-tuning argument for god, Rationalist atheology also exposes the way that the fine-tuning argument is fundamentally not about the weight of empirical evidence at all. No matter what scenario for life is true about our universe, theology can "prove" that god is behind it.

The No-Fail Argument from Fine Tuning:

1. Either life is abundant across the universe and intelligent life is also fairly common, or life is scarce across the universe and intelligent life is extremely rare.
2. If life is abundant across the universe and intelligent life is also fairly common, then a supernatural mind dictated the universe's laws.
3. If life is scarce across the universe and intelligent life is extremely rare, then a supernatural mind dictated the universe's laws.
4. Regardless of how hospitable the universe is for life, a supernatural mind dictated the universe's laws.

Therefore, a supernatural mind dictated the universe's laws.

The first premise is not supposed to be a false dichotomy excluding "life is moderately abundant . . ." and so forth, since it stands in for the range of possible affairs. The point of this general argument is that fine-tuning theology can stretch for its intended conclusion no matter what the universe is really like for life. That non-empirical status exposes the fine-tuning argument's dogmatism: we must be here on purpose! The alternative, that we live in a fortunate universe, is more reasonable by comparison, since that judgment answers to known facts as they are, not as we may wish them to be.

Furthermore, even if our kind of intelligent life is so terrible important on a cosmic scale, it is easy to imagine a more hospitable universe for creatures like us, so a design argument's explanation that our existence is a good reason to believe in a supernatural creator violates Rule 5, since our existence could also be due to the universe naturally creating us without any plan or protection. Ultimately, there is no justification for thinking that naturalistic alternatives to god must be presumptively ruled out. The fine-tuning

argument's assumption that we must forever regard our universe's structure as highly implausible again violates Rule 5.

Considering just the known facts, the observable universe overall is almost entirely hostile or indifferent to any life, which leads towards a "problem of evil" argument against a personal caring deity who intended to create us. Theodicies try to reconcile a preconceived notion of god with the actual world, claiming that their god would design this world no matter what. Theodicies lack clear and comprehensive explanations why observed evils are actually good, leaving matters in mystery (violating Rule 1), requiring the same thing to be essentially both evil and good (violating Rule 2), treating something as supremely good without proving a divine existence first (violating Rule 3), regarding evil as the responsibility of a perfectly good god (violating Rule 4), implying divine involvement without actually explaining it (violating Rule 5), blaming evil on a bad deity but leaving no reason for a good deity (violating Rule 6), or claiming that evil is necessarily from god but god is the singular being able to let evil happen without losing perfect goodness—unlike humanity (violating Rule 7).[14]

Summing up design arguments so far, the view that the universe's order is so improbable that it cannot have a natural basis fails to satisfy reason. The design argument's proposal that a supernatural god is a better explanation fails to satisfy reason as well. To make a supernatural god more useful than nature for explaining an ordered universe, an additional principle besides "order requires explanation" is required to tip the balance in favor of the supernatural. The design argument traditionally relies on a rule that "order cannot come from disorder" in order to render it implausible that our universe's structure just arose from whatever accidental natural processes were available before the Big Bang. Perhaps there were natural "raw materials" around, some physical ingredients useful for universe creation, but maybe that is not enough, at least not enough for a fairly complex universe like ours.

This second phase of the design argument proposes that complexity requires not just a special prior cause, but more specifically, some sort of intelligent design, by appealing to the principle that anything sufficiently complex must be created by something of even greater complexity. Of course, we have plenty of natural evidence that complex things can create similarly complex things. However, this principle that highly complex things require even more complex creators does not follow from any of the rules of reason, and science cannot support it either, so it remains an unjustified explanation (violating Rule 5). Science has discovered numerous ways that greater order can be produced by much disorder over time, and highly complex things can arise from long natural processes involving lesser complexity. Religion appeals to our intuitive sense that highly complex things are made by intelligences, and we have this intuitive sense because we grow up in a social world where complex artifacts have human

designers. However, just because we have good reason for applying rules about design to our social world does not automatically mean that this reasoning infallibly applies beyond that social world. Theology would have to claim that we can only be reasonable if we apply this complexity principle everywhere. No theological argument has successfully justified this claim (violating Rule 5 again), and theology only violates more rules of reason by stubbornly relying on it. If we must always apply the complexity principle in every context, then it presumably applies to this proposed creator god as well. Since the creator of our highly complex universe must be even more complex, then the complexity argument applies to this god as well, and we must infer that an even more complex god created the god that created our universe, and so on.

Attempting to circumvent this regress problem only violates more rules of reason. Proposing a "maximally" or "perfectly" complex god violates Rule 1 (what we are supposed to be imagining is a mystery beyond human comprehension) and it also violates Rule 6 (for all we know, this "maximally" complex thing might simply be the entirety of nature). Some theologians instead propose that the one creator god is actually quite simple so that the complexity principle does not apply to god. However, trying to imagine a perfectly simple god also stretches the human imagination beyond its limits (violating Rule 1) and leaves god far too simple to be able to explain anything as complex as the universe (violating the "order requires explanation" version of Rule 5). And if simplicity could actually create our universe, then a relatively simple and disordered natural cause to our universe can be the alternative explanation, making a creator god an unnecessary proposal (violating Rule 6). If theology tries to avoid all these problems by making the arbitrary claim that this lone creator god is one thing exempt from the complexity principle, then Rule 7 is violated.

All versions of the design argument are unreasonable failures, so supernaturalism is halted by another skeptical impasse. Perhaps it is understandable why most theologies today no longer look to the stars for signs of god, and instead look for signs within ourselves.

Revelation Arguments

Supernaturalism proposes that the best explanation for revelations about a god is that a supernatural god is actually real. It is not necessary for atheology to appeal to scientific explanations for religious experiences. Let them be real and meaningful for those who have them; must they also mean that a god is actually involved? Reasonable skepticism easily finds many problems involved with taking revelations to be reliable evidence for a deity. Revelations often yield no information (violating Rule 1), they contradict each other (violating Rule 2), they just repeat the belief "god exists" (violating Rule 3), their causal relation to a god must be mysterious (violating Rule 4), or they yield beliefs that different gods exist (violating Rule 6).

Each religion could claim that only their own revelations are valid, but that violates Rule 3 and Rule 6. Even taken singly, a lone revelation cannot be checked for veracity without verifying god caused it (violating Rule 3 and Rule 4), checking it against other approved revelations (violating Rule 6), or assuming it carries its own self-evident character (violating several rules, as detailed next).

Revelation is usually taken to be a direct encounter with something having divine character. Rather than enumerating all the different sorts of events and things taken to be revelatory (miraculous signs and visions, profound experiences, prophetic pronouncements, holy scriptures, and so on), we can simplify matters by taking all of them to be putative revelations. The issue is not whether people can take them to be direct encounters with the divine and appear as evidence of the divine; people around the world evidently do so. The issue is whether they are actually divine encounters. The revelation argument claims that the best explanation for a genuine revelation is that a supernatural deity is involved. There are three principal forms to this argument. The first considers all revelations taken generically, without discriminating among them by who has them or what religion they lean towards. The second considers only the collective experiences of a specified group of people. The third considers only individual personal revelations, taken singly.

Revelations taken generically across all humanity exhibit immense variety. Revelations too mysterious in themselves cannot indicate how any god is involved, so relying on them for evidence of the supernatural violates Rule 1. The revelations so indescribable that mystics are left speechless cannot serve as evidence for a single inconceivably transcendent reality. Expecting these information-less revelations to be pretty much the same, or similarly about the same mysterious god, violates Rule 1 and Rule 4.[15] Revelations that do convey some information often contradict each other across religions, and even within the same denomination or church, so relying on them all for evidence pointing to a supernatural god violates Rule 2. Revelations amounting to just "god exists" cannot count as evidence without violating Rule 3. Taking revelations to be supernatural things themselves also violates Rule 3, but if revelations are entirely natural (as brain states, say) then the revelation argument mysteriously connects two things having nothing in common, violating Rule 4. Revelations often yield beliefs by different people about very different gods, so taking revelations as explanations for just one supernatural god violates Rule 6. Excluding revelations that appear to be about different gods and elevating low-information mystical experiences to the status of 'truly' being about the one genuine mysterious god violates Rule 6. All these violations lead skeptics to judge that the argument for god from generic revelation is a failure.[16]

Rather than respect all revelations, religious believers typically claim that only some experiences supply revelation evidence: just those similar experiences of the same sort of god. Indeed, many religions are based on a small

set of related experiences about the 'same' god by a small number of people, in order to avoid the violations of reason already noted. This special set of revelations can serve as an authoritative guide to proper religious beliefs, useful for instruction in the religion and for testing any new revelations for validity. However, there is insufficient reason why just this group's set of similar experiences should count as the only valid revelations. The group should not claim that no explanation exists or that tradition must be blindly obeyed (violating Rule 1). They should not claim that god approves of just this set, since that assumes that god exists (violating Rule 3). If the group claims that no other experiences belong because they are too different from the basic set, this justification is circular by first assuming this group's validity (again violating Rule 3). If the group claims their set of revelations seem like the best about god to them, any other group could appeal to the same justification for their revelations and their god as well (violating Rule 6).

An argument from scriptural testimony for god runs into several violations in a similar manner. Theology cannot claim that scripture is so mysterious that god must be involved (violating Rule 1), or that all the world's contradictory scriptures still point to the same god (violating Rule 2), or that god approves scripture (violating Rule 3), or that god creates scripture (violating Rule 4), or that scripture simply must be divinely inspired (violating Rule 5). Theological defenses of one religion's scripture as the only truth about god runs into additional violations. Claiming that the one true god approves just this one scripture violates Rule 3. Simply claiming that a successful religion must be based on a true scripture has no justification, violating Rule 5. Claiming that any flaws in scripture are due to human ignorance or error, leaving the 'true' scripture (whatever that was) so perfect that god must be responsible, violates Rule 1 (where is this mysterious perfect scripture?), Rule 3 (why is a god assumed here?) and Rule 5 (what is the justification for assuming there ever was a 'perfect' scripture?). Pointing to a justification that any successful religion must have the most impressive scripture, and hence the most valid scripture, avoids violating Rule 5 but runs into a violation of Rule 6, since there have been many impressive scriptures and many successful religions about entirely different sorts of divine realities.

Arguments from scripture are a specific version of the general strategy of arguing from others' testimony about revelation for god's reality. That general strategy is just as unreasonable. Supposedly, the best explanation for peoples' testimony about their revelations is that god has delivered these revelations to them. Since this argument relies on the existence of genuine revelations, an idea already refuted, arguments from testimony automatically fail. Furthermore, the way that people testify or witness to some revelation or another cannot serve as adequate justification for regarding their claims about god as verified. We rarely take personal testimony to be very reliable even under the best of conditions concerning mundane matters, so it is unreasonable to accept testimony about extraordinary events or unearthly matters.[17]

The third kind of revelation argument focuses on individual personal experiences. By what method could it be shown that an unusual experience is a genuine revelation of a real god? Perhaps there cannot be any method at all, since theology is here considering only lone experiences taken singly, and comparisons against standard criteria or other experiences are not available here. There are very few options now. Verifying an alleged revelation of god could consist of checking to see if god is actually present during the revelation, but independent checking would require someone else having another experience of god, violating Rule 3. Perhaps verification of a revelation could try to track a causal relationship between god and the person having the revelation, but that violates Rule 3 again, and it also violates Rule 4. Admirers of revelation often argue that humanity would be lost without occasional contact with god, but no justification is supplied for why we shouldn't simply consider ourselves as living without god (the naturalistic option), so Rule 5 is violated. Perhaps verification could consist of checking it against other revelations already verified, but that appeals to an arbitrarily selected group of revelations, violating Rule 6.

Theologians are not unaware of these problems. Some suggest that genuine revelations do not need any verification, because they have the special character of "self-verification" or "self-evidence" or "veracity." Religions have all sorts of ways to express this special character. Revelations can "shine by their own inner truth" or "carry the stamp of divinity on them" or "transport one beyond the world," and so forth. Appealing to some special character relieving an experience from external judgment leads to violations of rules of reason, however. Since only some revelations can have it, how does one distinguish between experiences truly possessing this special character and those lacking it? Claiming that revelations are the experiences having a uniquely mysterious quality which establishes a mysterious divine cause violates Rule 1 and Rule 3. Claiming that self-evident revelations are those that go unchallenged by common sense does appeal to a valid meaning for "self-evident," yet alleged revelations about god are almost always challenged, so this explanation violates Rule 5. Plenty of religions can claim that revelations of their particular god possess the character of self-evident verification, so arbitrarily selecting only one religion's revelation leads to a violation of Rule 6. When a theology is compelled to describe of what this "self-evident" character actually consists, it is driven towards some mysteriously indescribable trait they are always driven back to favorably comparing a revelation with other prior approved revelations (violating Rule 3) or comparing a revelation with an approved prior conception of god (violating Rule 3 again).[18]

All three forms of the revelation argument—generic, collective, and individual—suffer from many violation of reason. Reason dictates a skeptical stance against their capacity to indicate that a supernatural god is real. Scientific atheology provides additional reasons to doubt that claims that revelations from heaven are miraculous events on earth. Rationalist

atheology is sufficient for skeptically doubting theological efforts to infer a god's reality from religious experiences.

Notes

1 Books offering ample Rationalist atheology include Flew, *The Presumption of Atheism* (1976); Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God* (1982); Nielsen, *Philosophy & Theism: In Defense of Atheism* (1985); Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (1996); Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and Against Beliefs in God* (2003); Everett, *The Non-Existence of God* (2004); Kenny, *The Unknown God: Agnostic Essays* (2004); Martin, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (2007); Oppy, *Arguing About Gods* (2006); Shook, *The God Debates* (2010). Dawes offers rigorous criteria for empirical explanatory adequacy, applicable to both naturalistic and supernaturalistic hypotheses, in *Theism and Explanation* (2009).

2 On the tradition of the *sensus divinitatus*, see Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (2007). A Calvinist view holds that original sin and humanity's fallen and depraved condition means that we lack well-functioning intellects sufficient to 'find' god, so god must miraculously reach out to us. See Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: A Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking* (2000). Moser defends an epistemology of individual theism, claiming that only those receptive to god's invitations receive further sufficient evidence for god, in *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (2008). These theological stances are examined in Shook, *The God Debates* (2010), chap. 6.

3 The naturalistic account from complete atheology would point out how the hominid line leading to *Homo sapiens* had evolved brains capable of modest and gradual learning, such as noting probable causes to observed events. On the argument for god from reason, see Shook, *The God Debates* (2010), chap. 4. On naturalism and reason, consult Beilby, ed., *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism* (2002); Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (2011); and Ruse, *The Philosophy of Human Evolution* (2012).

4 For an exploration of sufficient reason and its application in western science, philosophy, and theology, consult Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (2006).

5 Schellenberg's *The Will to Imagine: A Justification of Skeptical Religion* (2009) infers that an aspirational faith in the ultimate remains reasonable for any religious person. Lacking any concrete conception of this ideally ultimate reality, he offers an utter mystery as an explanatory ideal, allowing people to faithfully imagine whatever meaningfully elevates their lives. His skeptical agnosticism amounts to an argument for human religiosity and not for real god, so atheology welcomes his alliance.

6 For an atheological survey of ontological arguments, including modal logic arguments, see Oppy, *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God* (1995); Rundle, *Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?* (2004); and Maydole, "The Ontological Argument" (2009). Also consult Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and Against Beliefs in God* (2003), chap. 3.

7 For an introduction to theism and perfections of god, see Hoffman and Rosencrantz, *The Divine Attributes* (2002). Individual philosophers and critical examinations of their ontological arguments cannot be listed here. On Descartes, consult Marion, "The Essential Incoherence of Descartes' Definition of

Divinity" (1986). Atheological arguments exposing paradoxes of divine perfection are collected in Martin and Monnier, ed., *The Impossibility of God* (2003).

8 This section shall continue to refer to "nature as a whole" to indicate all possible nature, although concretely imagining such matters (if possible) is not required for atheology. Atheology does not assume naturalism. The term "nature as a whole" conveniently clarifies what theology thinks is in need of explanation. If "nature as a whole" is somehow conceptually or logically incoherent, atheology is unaffected but creation theology loses the very thing that supernaturalism is supposedly able to explain.

9 Craig runs afoul of this difficulty in his modern version of this Kalām argument in *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (1979). His later version, in Craig and Sinclair, "The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument" (2009), does not fare any better. Oppy, *Arguing About Gods* (2006), pp. 37–54, details Rationalist atheology criticisms, handling objections concerning infinity along with additional problems for this argument.

10 Pruss approaches these problems without resolving them in "The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument" (2009).

11 Theological discussions of divine creation are discussed in such works as May, *Creatio ex nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation Out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought* (1994); Copan and Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (2004); and Burrell, *Creation and the God of Abraham* (2010).

12 On intelligent design, consult Behe, *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism* (2007); Dembski and McDowell, *Understanding Intelligent Design* (2008); and Monton, *Seeking God in Science: An Atheist Defends Intelligent Design* (2009).

13 Many aspects to the design and fine-tuning arguments are discussed in Manson, *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science* (2003). Recently formulated versions of the fine-tuning argument are presented by Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (2003); McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology* (2009); Barrow et al., *Fitness of the Cosmos for Life: Biochemistry and Fine-Tuning* (2012); and Lewis and Barnes, *A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely Tuned Cosmos* (2016). The idea that the universe as a whole has an organized purpose but we are irrelevant to that purpose is explored in Mulgan, *Purpose in the Universe: The Moral and Metaphysical Case for Ananthropocentric Purposivism* (2015). Several of the skeptical criticisms presented in this section are indebted to Stenger, *The Fallacy of Fine-Tuning: Why the Universe Is Not Designed for Us* (2011).

14 See recent surveys of the argument from evil by Drees, ed., *Is Nature Ever Evil? Religion, Science, and Value* (2003), and O'Connor, *God, Evil and Design* (2009).

15 Scholars of religion no longer blithely assume that all religious experiences are homogenously alike, or have similar orientations to the same trans-experiential reality. Ineffability is just too convenient, and too tempting. Religions dictate appropriate language and understandings for unusual mental episodes, which then turn out to support just their creeds. Psychologists can apply a crafted set of criteria they define as a 'mystical' core and promptly find plenty of phenomena satisfying that set. See Hood, *Dimensions of Mystical Experiences: Empirical Studies and Psychological Links* (2001); and Paloutzian and Park, ed., *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (2005). Neither religions nor mystics are wrong about finding just what they seek. The actual diversity to spectrums of atypical states of awareness is undiminished all the same, while the import of such experiences remains radically underdetermined. Respect for

pluralism has accordingly revived. See Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (1985), and Harmless, *Mystics* (2007).

16 It is a rare book which systematically commits every one of these violations, but read Hick, *The New Frontier of Religion and Science: Religious Experience, Neuroscience, and the Transcendent* (2007). Hick had predecessors seeking that elusive revelatory core to all religions; see for example Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (1994).

17 Sophisticated versions of these points against hearsay about revelations and miracles are discussed in Fogelin, *A Defense of Hume on Miracles* (2003).

18 Compendiums of arguments from collective and individual revelations, committing most of the violations recounted here, are in Alston, *Perceiving God* (1991); Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (1993); and Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (2004), chap. 6. Wider perspectives on the diverse roles for religious experience within religion are offered by Bagger, *Religious Experience, Justification, and History* (1999); and Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (2009).

8 Scientific Atheology

Scientific atheology appeals to current sciences and scientific methodologies to explain why it is unreasonable to think that gods are real. The gods and demi-gods of traditional religions, and anthropomorphic deities in general, cannot survive scientific skepticism, but "science vs. religion" is hardly the whole story. Science does not prove that no god exists. Rationalist atheology is responsible for raising reasonable doubts towards any sort of supernatural being, and rejects various arguments for god such as the creation and design arguments that are based on features of the entire cosmos. While those "global" arguments receive far more attention, natural theology also includes "topical" arguments for god from fossil records gaps, genetic mutations, quantum randomness, conscious brains, and so forth. Science can defend itself against misrepresentations of its knowledge and methods. Scientific atheology offers philosophical responses to theological claims that certain areas of scientific knowledge indicate that a god is real.[1]

What scientific fields know, and what they do not yet know, is pivotal for both theology and atheology. Religion cannot know that science's knowledge is wrong, for religion is not competent to judge science even when it feels entitled to contradict science. Theology is no more competent to judge scientific knowledge. Despite that incapacity, natural theology developed variations to deal with science in distinctive ways. There are three positive variations. One version of natural theology globally accepts all of science, turning towards speculative theology to keep god compatible with scientific advances. (Rationalist atheology examines those speculative efforts.) A second version wants no collision with any scientific facts, only appealing to allegedly miraculous events that science cannot detect and contradict. Alternatively, natural theology can privilege one or another scientific field because its knowledge appears to warrant a postulated deity operating behind nature. Scientific atheology stands opposed to the second and third variations of topical natural theology.

Negative directions are available for topical natural theology, which also fall under Scientific atheology's purview. Theology may pick and choose among the sciences, arguing that certain theories (such as evolution) are mistaken or incomplete so that godly interventions appear to be indicated.

This selective natural theology has no competence to determine which scientific theories are failures—either it is pointing out empirical difficulties already apparent to science, or it is raising concerns lacking an evidential basis. Despite that lack of standing, an ambitious natural theology could attempt to construct its own criteria for what counts as a properly functioning scientific field, by dictating (in religious terms) how empirical matters must be interpreted. Sections of this chapter address the positive and negative variations to topical natural theology in turn.

Treating god like science's eventual discovery is a theological dead-end. Depicting supernaturalism as a falsifiable scientific hypothesis is an atheological blunder. Scientific atheology must start from a philosophically adequate understanding of science's postulates and methodologies.

Scientific Knowledge

Scientific atheology respects what science knows, and acknowledges where scientific frontiers are open for exploration. It rejects the false dichotomy that either science explains everything, or a god must explain what science cannot. Admitting that unknowns are presently unexplained is a sign of reasonable intelligence, while resorting to mystery as an explanation is unreasonable. Claiming that science will understand everything is not required for successful atheology, and establishing naturalism is not needed, either. Appealing to highly confirmed scientific theories (both Scientific atheology and natural theology may do so) is not the same thing as assuming that reductionism will prevail or that naturalism is the correct worldview.[2]

Scientific atheology accepts current science as a good guide about what happens in the world and why. Science is a better guide to the world's ways than any other cultural resource, including religion. This allegiance falls short of affirming the full naturalistic worldview, which awards ontological priority to all entities postulated by methodologically warranted theorizing. In simpler terms, theories best surviving the tests of scientific inquiry are describing what the world is really doing. (For the reader's convenience, this condensation of naturalism expresses the common root to 'methodological' and 'ontological' naturalism.)[3] Because the position that "Only science will rightly understand all reality" will never be an experimentally established hypothesis by any combination of scientific fields, that position is actually a philosophical stance that could only be justified by strenuous philosophy argumentation. Scientific atheology gets philosophical, but not about future knowledge of all reality. At the most, Scientific atheology fits a minimal mode of "scientism" by preferring today's highly confirmed scientific theories to non-scientific accounts of worldly matters.[4] This admission lends theology no advantage, because the alarming charge of "reductionism" linked with maximal scientism does not apply to Scientific atheology. Natural atheology should least of all complain about Scientific atheology's

attachment to present-day science, since natural theology and several kinds of speculative theologies also takes science quite seriously.[5]

Just as Scientific atheology cannot presume that naturalism is right, natural theology cannot start by assuming that science is often wrong. If the world around us is really quite different from what the inquiries of scientific fields find it to be, exposing such massive scientific error will take far more than scriptural attestation, personal anecdote, traditional authority, or churchly opinion. Nor does popular religious disdain for this or that scientific theory make any impact on Scientific atheology. Scientific knowledge, fallible and limited as it may be, counts as part of the body of knowledge available to humanity, regardless of whether individuals, religious or nonreligious, care to access or accept that information.

Natural theology can appeal to scientific information to seek out god, and Scientific atheology is no less entitled to use that information against god. Natural theology has to admit that mutual entitlement. After all, science has always had company in acknowleging the impressive natural order. Religions dating back to ancient times, quite independently from science, have appreciated the evident orderliness to nature, and credited a designing creator. Theologies of many religions have praised the tidy conveniences of environing habitats, and the fine workings of human bodies, to draw attention to signs of divinity. Theology must not fault science for starting from what anyone would observe for themselves.

Nor should science stand accused of unreasonably presuming what it must, that the world has plenty of regular order to investigate. Theology has long complained that the scientific worldview is incomplete, since the sheer presumption that laws of nature are there to be discovered is a premise requiring justification, a justification neither science nor naturalism can ever supply. As philosopher of religion Roger Trigg puts this complaint, "It has to be taken for granted that the world as investigated by science is ordered and structured. This is not a fact that can be discovered through science . . . reality is like that because God made it like that."[6] Yet theology cannot have it both ways. Is it a plainly evident fact about the world that it displays patterns of lawful regularity, or not? If so, then science has every right to start from the same evident situation to which theology can point. If no worldly patterns are evident, then theology cannot point to any natural order as a sign of divine creation. Either science and theology can both reasonably proceed from the world's environing ways, or neither may do so.

For theology, the world is not enough. Because natural theology takes the scientific account of reality to be incomplete, its proposed supplements involving supernatural creation and divine intervention must be non-scientific and will never constitute scientific knowledge. To see why, consider the implications to a proposal from natural theology that god interacts with some feature to the universe. Either that interaction is sporadically unpredictable, or it takes some discernable pattern (by repeating, or occurring constantly). If god's interaction seems fairly random to us observers (even if god has

its reasons), then it is best classified as miraculous, which is non-scientific (the next section discusses miracles). If god's interaction shapes a pattern in the phenomenon, then the proposal can either submit to rigorous scientific testing, or not (and if not, then the proposal is non-scientific). If the godly proposal submits to rigorously scientific testing, then it must take the form of a scientific hypothesis, which strips out irrelevant aspects to the proposal so that the patterned phenomenon is efficiently explained. The simplified causal hypothesis must take into account relevant scientific information, further delimiting the causal factors to this proposal (if the proposal resists these delimitations, it is non-scientific). Finally, this strictly causal hypothesis either becomes highly empirically confirmed and absorbed into science's view of nature (losing all godly features along the way), or it is disconfirmed and stays non-scientific.[7]

For example, consider a proposal that tiny invisible woodland sprites with an eccentric aesthetic sensibility are responsible for sprinkling dewdrops on the petals of lovely flowers in the morning's early hours. The corresponding hypothesis for experimental inquiry omits the personification and motivation, leaving only the causally relevant factors relating to getting dewdrops onto certain flowers. These entities W-S (woodland sprites) supposedly select flowers (not spider webs) for water droplet arrangements at certain times of the day. After the correlation between the ambient dew point and the appearance of dew is scientifically factored in, these W-S must automatically respond to dew points. These W-S must also get the water from some source (creating water *ex nihilo* is unscientific), and that source should be the air, where there already is water in the form of water vapor (taking into account a relevant scientific discovery). Since these W-S must automatically respond to the ambient dew point regardless of the type of surface, they must actually be responsible for more than just pretty flowers—they must handle all plant life (etc.) at the same surface temperature—which further eliminates anthropomorphic features from these W-S as explanatorily irrelevant. Eventually, through this process of focusing on causally relevant factors and experimental conditions, it will become apparent that either these W-S are just a convoluted way of describing the condensation of water vapor on outdoor surfaces, or these W-S are not needed to explain the phenomenon.

In order to supplement science (and not become part of science), a proposal from natural theology is destined, one way or another, to be non-scientific. Talking about godly proposals from natural theology as if they are scientific theories is misleading, obscuring the point of natural theology. Proposing an agent is not the big obstruction. Experimental scientific methods can test hypotheses about agents, and some scientific fields need agent-based explanations (and the life and behavioral sciences can observe those agents in action). The obstacles arise for scientifically tested proposals. Science must rigorously compare the capacity of competing hypotheses to effectively explain the phenomenon, and extraneous features to a

hypothesis doing no explanatory work are thereby eliminated, or else the hypothesis must be discarded. The physical sciences do not resort to agents for the methodological reason that better-fitting explanations for regularly patterned phenomena will postulate entities with regular causal properties (postulations ranging the ecologically systemic to causally mechanistic). Inconsistent willful agents are usually not needed where the phenomenon to be explained already has its own patterned order.

Scientific atheology cannot deny that science accepts the evident measure of natural order to the world, right along with humanity's good common sense. However, no scientific methodology dogmatically presumes any forever-guaranteed "uniformity of nature" to the cosmos as a whole. Nothing about science must deny the inherent epistemic limitations to inductive generalizations. The experimental methodologies doing the real work within scientific investigations nowhere require a premise that the entire cosmos is completely regularized. Whether all events in the universe occur in lawful patterns that are potentially describable by strict or probabilistic laws is something that the sciences set out to discover, not something already presumed in advance.

Unexpected events are essential to scientific progress. Many of science's theoretical advances start from unanticipated deviations or curious exceptions to otherwise reliable laws. Scientific laws are no longer what they once were, either. Subatomic physics and organic chemistry, for example, are already reconciled to degrees of chanciness beyond the ken of deterministic linear equations. Scientific progress seeks order, no matter how convoluted, in order to fulfill its obligation to the principle of sufficient reason. Science's search for order in an incredibly complex world is not the same thing as assuming that comprehensible order will invariably be found, so nothing scientific is grounded on an unprovable principle about all of nature.

Science and Miracles

As a regulative heuristic, the incessant search for natural uniformities is compatible with irregular and even unique events occurring anywhere in nature. An odd deviation from a pattern, or an irregularity that seems to fit no pattern, even if it goes unexplained by scientific theory, can be as natural as anything. Such anomalies cannot be summarily classified as "unnatural" since the definition of "natural event" is not "an event already covered by a law from an established scientific theory." A surprising burst of radio waves arriving from deep space, or an ancient fossil of an animal unlike that epoch's known species, is not "unnatural" or "miraculous" just because a full explanation may elude science.

Correctly classifying a natural event as anomalous is very far from rightly calling it a miracle. Science duly catalogues anomalies but it does not acknowledge miracles. The reason why science does not acknowledge miracles is not because science dogmatically presumes uniformity (it does

not) but rather because no scientific field is compelled to acknowledge an unproven notion, and crediting something anomalous as miraculous stands unconfirmed. Philosophy can enlarge on this important point to make matters clear. Religions expects miracles to have godly causes, and theology infers godly responsibility for miracles. To show that some natural anomaly is actually an unnatural miracle requires more argument than just labeling curious anomalies as miracles: an actual relation to a god must be demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt.[8] The theological short-cut of labeling curious matters as "miracles" and then resting content with that made-up "evidence" for god is far more dogmatic than science's honest treatment of anomalies. Anomalous events are not miracles just because the faithful like to say so.

John Lennox, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford, illustrates these missteps for theology on miracles. His book *God and Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?* (2011) first says that Hawking "appears committed" to the absolute uniformity of nature (but no quotation from Hawking stating such a thing is produced by Lennox), and then Lennox adds that such absolute uniformity is unknowable to finite minds, in order to infer that divine interventions are entirely possible no matter what science may say.[9] No serious argument that anomalies in nature can really be miracles is supplied anywhere in his book. Only Lennox's excessive confidence in divine responsibility for nature's orderliness allows him to speedily conclude that any Creator making laws can violate those laws.

Is science blind to miracles? Nothing about science renders it blind to anomalies—indeed, scientific inquiries are far better at detecting anomalies than any untrained spectator. What religion thinks that the faithful can see, such as bleeding statues or spirited apparitions, should also be accessible to careful observation. (Saying that miracles must first be believed to be seen cannot yield a valid argument for god.) If something is actually there in front of the naked eye then it can be captured by a camera. Now that most people in many countries around the world have cell phone cameras at arm's reach at all hours, why are reports of ghostly, demonic, or angelic visitations not dramatically higher now than in days of old? Such strange encounters are evidently more about what is going on the psychological realm than an other-worldly realm. What mainly distinguishes scientific observation from naïve perception is the reduction of observer error and bias, along with the mechanical reliability of technical equipment. Science places little faith in observation per se; whether data-collection procedures are reliable must be ascertained and never presumed. Science never assigns as much credibility to perception as religion does, where anyone's strangest experience can get credited with encountering the miraculous. Science is less trusting, but that does not render science blind.

If theology claims that it is an anomaly's connection to god that goes undetected by science, Scientific atheology replies that any supposed connection to a god is indemonstrable. How could that connection be proven

by theology? This set of arguments are valid but the second premise of each argument cannot be known to be true, so their conclusions are not knowable:

> Science has not yet explained anomaly A.
> Either science explains anomaly A now, or a god must exist to account for A.
> Therefore, a god exists.
>
> Science may never explain anomaly A.
> Unless science eventually explains A, a god must exist to account for A.
> Therefore, a god exists.
>
> No scientific discipline is adequate for explaining anomaly A.
> If the naturalistic approach by scientific disciplines fails to explain A, then the supernatural approach explains A.
> Therefore, a god exists.

Each second premise mistakenly supposes that any godly account must be explanatory just because a scientific explanation is not available. That is not how reasonable explanations work—any proposed explanation must garner its own support irrespective of the plausibility to rival explanations. Only by ruling out all other possible explanations could one account acquire credibility without independent support.

This next set of arguments tries to rule out non-godly accounts for anomalies, but they are all fallacious:

> Anomalies unexplained by science are matters that do not seem natural.
> Matters that are not natural are due to a god.
> Therefore, anomalies unexplained by science are due to a god.
>
> Various anomalies are going unexplained by science.
> If a god is real, then people would encounter anomalies unexplained by science.
> Therefore, a god is real.
>
> Anomalies that happened in the far past are events beyond the ability of science to investigate.
> Either one accepts a supernatural cause for such events or one irrationally assumes natural causes without evidence.
> Therefore, a god is real.

The first argument commits the fallacy of four terms: what does not seem natural may still be natural. The second argument commits the fallacy of affirming the consequent: a god is not the only possible explanation. The

third argument commits the fallacy of false dichotomy: one can accept a reasonable scientific explanation for a past anomalous event, or one could reasonably doubt the veracity of reports about past anomalies. It cannot be unreasonable to place greater confidence in laws of nature (which are confirmable everywhere) than in tales of miracles (which are curiously difficult to confirm anywhere).[10]

If theology regards a miracle as a violation of a law of nature, it undertakes more than it is prepared to handle. To accurately identify a miracle, a violation of a law of nature must be correctly detected. What should truly count as a violation of a law of nature? Surely science would know better than any non-scientific opinion. A deviation from a natural law is a sign for science that either (a) observational error is involved; (b) additional influential factors haven't been taken into account; (c) that natural law may need refinements; or (d) another natural law is involved too. Even if observational error or theoretical revision is ruled out, what still seems to be one law's "violation" is actually the perfect fulfillment of that law thanks to all influential factors and relevant laws. For example, a planet's observed orbit never matches the calculations from Newtonian mechanics, since (a) the best telescopes leave small measurement errors; (b) there are multiple simultaneous gravitational factors, such as other planets; (c) when Newtonian laws of motion are applied to three masses or more, only intricately refined formulas will yield approximate solutions; and (d) a planet close to the sun's large mass, such as Mercury, follows an orbit affected by the greater spacetime curvature calculable by Einstein's theory of general relativity. In short, science need not worry about violations to laws of nature, except insofar as anomalous events point the way to new scientific discoveries and theories. To know that an event is truly in violation of all laws of nature, it would be necessary to first check that event against a vastly complicated array of formulas probably beyond precise calculation even by supercomputers. As difficult as that should sound, it is even more difficult to imagine how theology would confirm genuine violations of natural law before science could.

Rather than waiting for science to re-check its formulas and calculations, theology would rather defend bizarre stories from credulous people that could never be countenanced by basic textbook science: the resurrection of dead bodies, the levitation of saintly yogis, the faith healing of terminal diseases, and so on. The success rate of empirically confirming miracles by basic standards of reliable evidence (and hearsay never counts) is as low as the success rates for proving such things as psychic powers or alien abductions, which all stand at zero.[11] Applying well-established scientific knowledge against superstitions, magical thinking, miracle workers, psychic abilities, faith healing, and any type of pseudoscience, is undertaken by skeptical investigators who are able to expose how people can be deceived and can deceive themselves.[12]

The theologies of major world religions, for their part, are not ardently endorsing astrology anymore. They only half-heartedly acknowledge fresh

miracles, rarely credit reports of demonic possession, screen out clerical pretentions to psychic abilities, and omit faith healing from theological treatises. Nevertheless, Scientific atheology's skeptical stance against common religious convictions is a major component of atheology's opposition to religious belief.

Some "miracles" happen in plain sight, but they are more in the eyes of beholders. Medical "miracles" are unexpected and sometimes inexplicable to hospital physicians, but such medical improbability does not mean that they were naturally impossible. In order for theology to know that a surprising medical recovery is naturally impossible, it would have to know far more about biochemistry, genetics, physiology, and neuroscience than science.

There are a few matters that science declares to be strictly impossible anywhere in the universe, such as violations of fundamental laws such as the conservation of energy and the conservation of momentum. No theologian has yet stepped forward to present impressive empirical evidence or theoretical advances to show that such violations have really occurred. Theology prefers to talk more about gaps in science's knowledge than its own ignorance. The next two sections discuss theological arguments grounded in science's evidential and theoretical gaps.

God in the Evidential Gaps

If only it were a simple question of evidence. In common parlance, evidence 'E' typically counts as evidence for hypothesis 'H' just in case that if H were actually so, then E would be found. For ordinary psychology, so long as no competing hypothesis sounds plausible, E seems like good evidence for H. Intellectual refinements are rarely necessary for the devoutly faithful. Natural theology has lost no momentum from dispensing proverbial insights, such as: Here are humans with helpful bodily capabilities; the loving Creator would endow creatures with beneficial capabilities; hence the power of sight is evidence of the Creator. These "insights" all commit the fallacy of affirming the consequent.

Sophisticated varieties of topical natural theology deserve Scientific atheology's closer scrutiny. That scrutiny starts from an appropriate understanding of evidence. Neither natural theology nor science should take 'evidence' to mean whatever satisfies a dogmatic and closed mind. Science is interested in evidence that is collected scientifically, regardless of whether it comports with current theory. (Individual scientists, to be sure, can get dogmatic about their theories, but that human frailty is not part of scientific methodology.) Investigators collect plenty of facts during inquiries that may become useful evidence for or against a hypothesis in the future. Paleontologists can examine fossils that were collected two hundred years ago, at a time when few people could think of ways for those strange objects to be evidence for much of anything. Fossils did became essential evidence to test scientific

theories, and they will remain useful into the future for fresh theorizing. Science is happy to point out how newly discovered facts are consistent with established theory, but no scientific hypothesis becomes credible just from the mere quantity of evidence, since evidential quality is more important. For example, a few newly discovered facts consistent with just one hypothesis among rivals does far more to elevate credibility than a situation where a lone hypothesis without rivals appears to have many familiar facts backing it. Scientific atheology cannot permit natural theology to refer to "evidence" so loosely that anything consistent with a religious conviction can count as good evidence. Something unobservable can acquire credibility through careful scientific inquiry, but no credibility is deserved if nothing detectible in the world could ever be inconsistent with it. Mere consistency with anything that may happen cannot increase a proposal's probability, and the promise of inevitable consistency dooms a proposal to incredulity, as Rationalist atheology confirms.[13]

If inevitable consistency is a proposal's downfall, could a proposal's consistency with science elevate its reasonableness? That question beckons the third positive variation of topical natural theology: natural theology can privilege a scientific field's knowledge to argue that this body of knowledge warrants the existence of a deity. The fields of astronomy and cosmology have long been favorites for theology, from the ancient discovery that heavenly objects follow regular paths to the Big Bang theory about the universe's origin. At stake are the signs of godly sentience: does an intelligence guide nature? Regarding the universe as a whole, Rationalist atheology strongly doubts religious creation stories. As for what has been going on within the universe, the vast reaches of space no longer appear so tightly regulated. The dispersal of galaxies, stars, planets, asteroids, comets, debris, and dust across the cosmos can be explained with a few physical laws and billions of years for innumerable lumpy accretions and stellar explosions. For a long time, the prehistoric idea prevailed that exceptions to the rule of heavenly laws, such as eclipses and comets, must be portentous signs from god. Religion thus enjoyed the convenience of finding divine signs in both the regular and irregular events in the skies. Natural theology has also looked to the earth for signs of divine beneficence or malevolence. The arrangement of lands and seas, providing for hospitable uplands and useful bays, kept natural theologians enraptured by god's obvious architecture. Anything less commodious, such as an earthquake, was also perceived as a signal about god's intentions towards humanity.

Theism demands that god is at least an agent, having both sentience and intelligence: sentience appreciates and makes order, while intelligence additionally selects and pursues means to advance its ends. Regular order, therefore, can be attributable to something sentient, while irregular events can be attributable to an intelligence (which, being sentient, can make order too). Reasonable doubts towards a proposal that a sentient being is involved with some phenomenon in nature can be efficiently raised by pointing out

that this phenomenon lacks much order. However, a proposal that intelligence is involved with that same phenomenon cannot be so easily dismissed. Any minimal order displayed in the phenomenon can be attributed to an agent's sentience while irregularities to that same phenomenal order can be interpreted as signs that this agent is pursuing a goal. Since a scientific field's body of knowledge contains information about detected irregularities as well as tracked regularities, there is nothing in principle preventing natural theology from proposing that god's agency is involved with all that information.[14]

By the early twentieth century, there was very little about the heavens and the earth to serve as unequivocal evidence of divine planning and execution. Regularities and irregularities were more simply explained by natural forces. Global natural theology conversed with cosmology, while topical natural theology narrowed its focus to the human world. Humanity had always been theology's special purview. The field of human physiology contains information about the organization and operations of the body's components and interrelated systems. How can physiology support the idea of god's involvement? Well-functioning bodily features evidently permit humanity's ability to flourish in the environment in ways analogous to other animals. That orderly functioning is evidence of general design, as bestowed by god, according to natural theology. Humans are also endowed with peculiar traits and unique capacities (such as large brains and reasoning powers), which are signs of god's special design from a particular regard for humanity. Humans had to be special for theism, but no aberrations could go overlooked. Deficiencies or deformities, along with diseases and dementias, were taken to be signs of divine judgment by theology.

During the Enlightenment the compelling question was asked: Should divine oversight and judgment be attached to all functions and dysfunctions? The broad explanatory power of godly supervision looks very much like the regulatory power of godly consent. Why would god encourage the idea that all those human troubles are really our own fault? Morally enlightened people doubt that so many illnesses reflect our sins, and they doubt that a moral god would use illnesses as punishments. That doubt allows believers to step back from the brink of raising the "problem of evil" which asks why god is complicit with evils. If god is not allowing illnesses to serve as punishments, then god can be less complicit with those evils. One can still ask why there are so many human troubles, but divine evils visited upon innocents cannot be among them. However, lessened godly involvement implies less divine supervision, and god should not be used to explain all human deficiencies. Natural theology's agenda to guarantee that god explains both the regularities and irregularities to human physiology had to halt, and so it did. With that capitulation, the third variation to positive natural theology ran out of steam entirely. Seeking signs of spiritual interest and oversight in anything strange or disturbing was left to religious superstitions and pseudo-scientific fads.

With the advent of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), natural theology was presented with the opportunity to propose that god has used evolution for divine purposes. Physiology, according to scientific biology, understands the organization and functioning of the body primarily through the theory of evolution by natural selection. From theism's point of view, in order to prevent natural selection (an insentient, purposeless process) from explaining everything about human life, some decisive evidence for divine involvement with evolution must be identified. Typical proposals from theology claimed that (a) important dissimilarities between the human form and animal forms indicate special creation for humanity; (b) gaps in the fossil record indicate discontinuities where special creation would have occurred; (c) the mutations required for evolution could have natural causes, but they also could have a divine cause; (d) the changes to species due to random mutation and mechanistic causation are insufficient to explain the complexities and functions of higher life forms. To take full advantage of this opportunity, natural theology had to additionally claim that evolutionary biology together with other sciences cannot supply better explanations about human dissimilarities, fossil record gaps, the occurrence of mutations, and the physical causes behind complexity. Comparing the explanatory merits of general evolution with special creation called for natural theology to put more effort into showing where science cannot explain crucial evidential matters than showing how a creator deity can explain the organic world.

Natural theology, by taking this contrary stand on evidence, twists into a negative theoretical stance against science. By gaining explanatory advantages there, natural theology could simultaneously take credit for explaining life's bounties when science cannot, while leaving nature as the proximate cause of life's limitations. Theism's god is the good guy, after all.

God in the Theoretical Gaps

Scientific biology is a discipline enlarging its theoretical understanding of organic life. What passes for a wider understanding of "Darwinism" pro or con is something else. Scientific atheology relies on scientific biology, with natural selection as a central pillar, to deflate arguments by natural theology for god based on the biological world and human life. No defense of widespread notions about what Darwinian evolution may mean—Progress! Utilitarianism! Survival of the Fittest! Secularism! Nihilism!—is forthcoming from Scientific atheology. Defenders of Darwinism can become ideological and dogmatic in the pursuit of spurring social change and winning culture wars, as Michael Ruse amply documents in *Darwinism as Religion* (2017). Ruse also points out that even if Darwinism sounds like atheism to many, scientific biology is not atheism, because a scientific field's theoretical advances must not be confused with a philosophical worldview such as naturalism, and, in addition, atheism is not equivalent to naturalism. Likewise,

debating with naturalism will never allow natural theology to refute evolution by natural selection, which is a highly confirmed theory answerable to scientific methodology. Evolution cannot disprove god, and god cannot disprove evolution.

Variations of natural theology during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries adapted to the enlarging successes of evolutionary theory as it merged with population genetics and other developments to forge the Modern Synthesis. The abiding religious concern was humanity: Humans are theistically necessary, because god must have wanted us and wants a relationship with us. (The idea of god offering salvation to some other highly evolved species if it had descended from the primate order instead of our species cannot be comforting. The child wants to be wanted; parents gladly loving some other child instead is not a happy thought.) The scientific theory of evolution implies the improbability of our singular species: since we were not a necessary outcome of evolution, a god leaving life entirely to evolution seems unacceptable to theism. A cosmic plan which could have easily left us out cannot be a theologically satisfactory plan. More than divine agency and intelligence is at stake: theism also expects special providence for humanity. Natural theology is accordingly burdened with arguing that divine agency and evolution are theoretically complementary: the explanatory aims of evolution need to be supplemented with the idea of divine intervention, because theoretical biology cannot account for everything important about life and humanity on its own. Scientific experts in biology, genetics, and related areas are the front-line responders to this theological strategy, pointing out misrepresentations of known facts and distortions to scientific hypotheses.[15] Scientific atheology philosophically scrutinizes theological depictions of divine agency as reasonably explanatory and compatible with scientific methodology.

Asserting that explanatory compatibility between god and evolution has been on natural theology's agenda from the early days of Darwin's reception by the intellectual world. Harvard botanist Asa Gray is a good example. No one in America supported evolution over Biblical creationism more than Gray in those years, but he also affirmed divine intervention. His reviews of *On the Origins of Species* during 1860, collected as *Natural Selection not inconsistent with Natural Theology* (1861), reiterate the design argument that purpose can never arise from a purposeless process.

> [W]e think that a theistic view of Nature is implied in his book, and we must charitably refrain from suggesting the contrary until the contrary is logically deduced from his premises. If, however, he any where maintains that the natural causes through which species are diversified operate without an ordaining and directing intelligence, and that the orderly arrangements and admirable adaptations we see all around us are fortuitous or blind, undesigned results,—that the eye, though it came to see, was not designed for seeing, nor the hand for handling,—then, we

> suppose, he is justly chargeable with denying, and very needlessly denying, all design in organic Nature . . .[16]

Because biology cannot ignore the plain fact of ample function and purpose in complex organs and organisms, Gray concludes that special divine guidance is necessary for mounting a complete explanation.

This venerable argument from design remained a cornerstone for Creationism and the agenda of Intelligent Design (ID). Both theological positions presumptively deny that material processes, no matter how intricate or time-consuming, could generate the high levels of functional organization so abundant in the biological realm. The signal difference between Creationism and ID lies in the latter's claim that divine involvement with life's designs counts as a scientific theory because it improves biology's capacity to explain life.[17]

William Dembski aligns ID's distrust towards mechanism with its embrace of divine design in this way:

> Science must work with available evidence, and on that basis (and that basis alone) formulate the best explanation of the phenomenon in question. This means that science cannot explain a phenomenon by appealing to the promise, prospect, or possibility of future evidence. In particular, unknown mechanisms or undiscovered ways by which those mechanisms might operate cannot be invoked in order to explain a phenomenon. If known material mechanisms can be shown to be incapable of explaining a phenomenon, then it is an open question whether any mechanism whatsoever is capable of explaining it. If, further, there are good reasons for asserting the specified complexity of certain biological systems, then design itself becomes assertible in biology. . . . Evolutionary biology teaches that all biological complexity is the result of material mechanisms. These include, principally, the Darwinian mechanism of natural selection and random variation, but they also include other mechanisms (symbiogenesis, gene transfer, genetic drift, the action of regulatory genes in development, self-organizational processes, etc.).[18]

Dembski's ample listing of processes important for contemporary evolutionary theory represents more than his grasp of evolution's Modern Synthesis during the mid-twentieth century and what has been called the Extended Synthesis of recent discoveries.[19] They are natural processes, to be sure, but Dembski makes sure to classify them all as "material mechanisms." It this just a long string of coincidences? What are the odds that the next scientific discovery in this line would be met with Dembski's label of "material mechanism"?

Perhaps Dembski has deep insights into the nature of all material mechanisms, although he has not divulged any detailed criteria in his writings on Intelligent Design. That is unfortunate, since the explanatory role of

function, purpose, and mechanistic causality has been intensely debated in philosophy of biology. Many biologists are no longer sure that emergent, self-organizing, and autopoetic systems fit well with mechanistic causality or materialist reduction.[20] If a biological consensus emerged around certain natural processes that non-mechanistically yield the high complexity once associated with design, would Dembski promptly discard divine design? It is easier to expect that he would instead argue that those peculiar processes are themselves so "irreducibly complex" that divine design must be involved with them, too. This is a reasonable expectation: he apparently equates 'material' with 'mechanistic', he has said that 'emergence' is no better than 'alchemy', and he continually accuses evolutionary biology of presuming naturalism in every explanatory hypotheses.[21]

A priori arguments against natural design inspired by philosophers from Plato to Leibniz are doing the real argumentative work with positions such as Dembski's, not the façade of concern for empirical matters. These arguments rely on a metaphysical axiom to the effect that no natural processes discoverable by science could produce the highest complexities that appear to be designed. Furthermore, a proposal that a god intervenes with life to guarantee complexity and design is not genuinely scientific. Irrelevant personifications to god must be stripped out as non-explanatory, and experimental testing involving a god is not feasible since no one could know when the god variable is controlled or screened out. The idea that a powerful intelligence has providentially affected the course of earthly life has no scientific status, and it cannot be relevant to biology.[22]

Scientific atheology analyzes all of natural theology's proposals in a manner similar to its refutation of Intelligent Design. Supernatural responsibility cannot be ruled in just because physical explanations get presumptively ruled out. Natural theology should have learned this lesson from earlier forays onto science's territory. The Newtonian "action at a distance" effect of gravity did not comport with eighteenth-century materialism, which suggested to many (including John Locke) that God adds special forces to the world of material bodies. Nineteenth-century biology was convulsed by the Vitalistic doctrine that something spiritual infuses organic matter to account for the development and reproduction of organisms. Neither proposal turned out to be independently testable by rigorous scientific methodologies, and both proposals were eventually eliminated by scientific progress, such as the theory of general relativity and the discovery of DNA.

There was one lesson learned by natural theology: define the subject matter needing a divine explanation in terms inaccessible to any natural account. A contemporary example illustrates this strategy. Does the inability of science to explain consciousness demonstrate that a supernatural being exists? Consider this typical argument:

1. Consciousness possesses essential properties that are nothing like the properties of anything natural.

2. Any scientific hypothesis trying to explain consciousness only appeals to properties of natural matters.
3. An account of A solely in terms of P cannot fully explain the non-P features of A.
4. A scientific hypothesis to explain consciousness fails to fully explain essential properties of consciousness (and what the hypothesis can explain is not really consciousness).
5. Only a hypothesis appealing to non-natural properties like those essential to consciousness could fully explain consciousness.
6. The proposal that a supernatural being is responsible for consciousness can fully explain consciousness.

Therefore, there is a supernatural being.

The variations to this argument are too numerous to discuss,[23] but they usually rely on propositions similar to the first two premises. Scientific atheology first observes that the tension between premises 1 and 2 compels the natural theology to periodically revise what counts as essential properties to consciousness. For example, intentionality used to seem aloof from materialistic science, but the cognitive and brain sciences are rendering the intentionality to ordinary waking consciousness more amenable to neurological explanations. It is reasonable to expect that other 'essential' features to consciousness will come to be viewed as non-essential as science progresses. Although there might be something about consciousness that resists scientific explanation for a very long time, switching views on consciousness to stay one step ahead of science is not a maneuver grounded in deep insights into consciousness.

As for premise 3, natural theology has never provided a satisfactory justification for a principle like this, and natural theology must violate this arbitrary rule by proposing a supernatural god to explain the natural world. Finally, premise 6 is insufficient for carrying the argument to its conclusion. Even if consciousness eludes science's complete explanation, at most that shows that two kinds of reality appear to co-exist and co-ordinate. Judging that consciousness is not part of nature is not the same thing as demonstrating that a supernatural being created the rest of reality, and theology's burden of proof is not lightened by consciousness's ability to perplex the sciences. Besides, atheism's fate is not chained to physicalist naturalism. For example, atheism is compatible with the straightforward dualism of Descartes or a dual-aspect ontology inspired by Spinoza, and Rationalist atheology refutes attempts to erect a god upon those ontological grounds.

Nature According to Natural Theology

Scientific atheology does not presume or defend naturalism, but it must object when theological arguments for god are premised on limiting science

to certain types of theoretical explanation, or locking science into a narrow definition of naturalism. Prejudging what science must generally say about nature, now and forever, is outside of the competence of theology, and beyond the prescience of philosophy. Naturalism's overall view of the cosmos is just the aggregate knowledge from what the sciences are able to theoretically confirm. Naturalism grows with science. A dramatic discovery—such as quantum entanglement or nonlocality—can seem unnatural only to people with a dogmatic view of the natural. (That is why pseudo-scientific novelties mushroom after such discoveries.) The natural worldview must be continually updated by the sciences themselves; nothing theological is entitled to contradict well-confirmed scientific theories or decree nature's boundaries.

The liberty of the sciences to describe nature through their own theories was not easily achieved. Medieval theology cramped scientific hypotheses with dogmatic metaphysics, ecclesiastical authorities during the Renaissance charged many speculating scientists with heresy, and Enlightenment theologians expected scientific theories to reveal divine design. Science continually disappoints supervisory theology, but science's liberation from theology's oversight might mean natural theology's liberation from science. That measure of independence would lessen the antagonism between science and natural theology, by relieving natural theology of the onerous duty to dispute scientific fields over their understanding of evidential grounds and experimental methodologies. Additionally, natural theology would no longer have to leave arguments for god's existence so vulnerable to the advent and demise of scientific paradigms. The best understanding of nature could guide natural theology, rather than the variable perspectives on nature amendable to current empirical inquiry.

Alister McGrath, a foremost expert on the history and philosophy of theology, has explored opportunities for natural theology to establish a different kind of relationship between science on the one side and the rest of Christian theology on the other side. Theology, for McGrath, is Christian theology, and nature is creation, made by the Creator. Natural theology therefore starts out from Christian theology. McGrath's book *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (2011) begins by outlining this relationship:

> This book sets out develop a distinctively Christian approach to natural theology. . . . It is argued that Christian theology provides an interpretive framework by which nature can be "seen" or "read" in certain specific ways—ways that are not necessarily mandated by nature itself. It is argued that Christian theology provides an interpretive framework by which nature can be "seen" in a way that connects with the transcendent. . . . A Christian understanding of nature is the intellectual prerequisite for a natural theology which discloses the Christian God.
>
> (pp. 3, 4)

McGrath expands on the crucial role of interpretive frameworks:

> Like a text, nature is "read" or "interpreted" in a wide variety of manners. Similarly, scientific theories can be "read" or "interpreted" in markedly divergent manners: some thus interpret Darwin's theory of natural selection as entailing atheism, where others see it as strongly supportive of belief in theism. Yet while nature is patient of such multiple readings, it neither demands them, nor legitimates them. Nature does not provide its own authorized interpretation.
>
> (p. 148)

McGrath utilizes two types of interpretation in this passage: interpretations of nature, and interpretations of theories about nature. They can be related; a scientific theory is an interpretation of natural matters, while that theory can itself be interpreted as conducive to one 'ism', or another. That relationship doubly distances an atheism relying on science, and a theism relying on science, from nature itself (whatever that 'nature' per se might mean). If natural theology relies on its preferred interpretation of science to support god's existence, that sort of natural theology is two interpretative stages apart from nature. A two-step separation, in itself, may not be problematic in general, but the two types of interpretation must not be conflated. We could distinguish 'primary' from 'secondary' levels of interpretation, although that is not McGrath's wording. In any case, that double separation permits McGrath to point out that Enlightenment natural theology de-emphasized the Bible in order to defend a philosophical god more suited to science's view of nature and more congenial to deism or unitarianism. While acknowledging how natural theology can proceed too independently from the rest of theology, his example of a natural theology more entangled with science than ensconced within Christianity serves as a dire warning. McGrath renounces "any artificial distinction between natural theology and revealed theology . . . A Christian natural theology both mandates and enables a way of imagining the world which is informed by a rich Trinitarian understanding of the economy of salvation" (p. 61).

Since there cannot be any non-conceptual or uninterpreted account of nature, a point that philosophy and atheology may concede, competing interpretations of nature cannot appeal to their direct correspondence with nature itself. Although none could be perfectly true, is there no way to reasonably judge primary interpretations as more or less adequate? McGrath holds that interpretations are promulgated by communities; a community is committed to its preferred interpretations, including its interpretation of nature. The way to reasonably judge better interpretations is to adhere to the interpretations of one's community, which serve as the standards of value, rationality, and knowledge, against which other interpretations can be compared

and evaluated. The Christian Church serves for McGrath as a clear example of a religious community with its own distinctive interpretations:

> Any interpretive community offers a construction or re-imagination of nature based on certain precommitments and presuppositions; the Church is no exception to this rule, reading and viewing nature in an act of intellectual and imaginative obedience to its fundamental vision of reality.
>
> (p. 93)

In the same manner, a scientific community forms its interpretation of nature in accord with scientific standards of knowledge. On this view of interpretative communities, science independently accumulates its knowledge of nature without interference or supervision from religion or theology, and the line between doing science and doing theology need not be blurred. McGrath's approach treats science as one way of primarily interpreting nature, among many interpretations. In that sense, positive science occupies a non-committed and neutral position among worldviews offering interpretations of science. Scientific interpretations are available for secondary interpretations grounded in other interpretations. Science's knowledge neither favors atheism or theism, according to McGrath, but any knowledge can receive further interpretation. Just as a nonreligious naturalism can interpret science to conform with naturalism, Christianity can interpret science's view of nature to conform with trinitarianism, and that secondary interpretation should be natural theology's agenda, according to McGrath. With interpretative communities in charge of their own evaluations, Christians can be confident that a Christian natural theology yields an interpretation of science compatible with Christianity.

Any ambitious worldview can reformulate and incorporate disparate interpretations in this manner. McGrath views naturalists pursuing their own interpretative agenda, amounting to something like "A naturalistic understanding of nature is the intellectual prerequisite for a natural science which discloses the naturalistic worldview." Several of his books accuse naturalists and atheists of requiring that genuine sciences only postulate naturalistic entities, ensuring science's predestined "discovery" that the cosmos is only natural. McGrath only perceives atheism as natural atheology. While engaging in polemics with popularizers of science and atheism, their "atheist fundamentalism" is depicted as the central problem.[24]

On McGrath's own thesis about interpretative communities, Christianity and naturalism rest on the same epistemic level, with neither worldview enjoying an inherent rational advantage. It would fair to assess that situation as a postmodernist standoff between grand narratives. McGrath counts on that skeptical standoff to infer natural theology's reasonableness for those affirming the Christian narrative. The appropriate standard

of reasonableness for natural theology's interpretation of nature should be its consistency with Christianity, not its capacity to deduce god's existence from scientific facts.

> Although natural theology is sometimes presented as deductive—that is, that observation of nature necessarily leads to a theistic conclusion—most forms of natural theology are actually inductive, arguing for a fundamental resonance or congruence between experience of the world and a theistic framework. The observation of fine-tuning within the universe is thus not proposed as a proof of theism, but as what might be expected if theism were true. The capacity of a hypothesis to explain observations or experience is here taken to raise the probability of that hypothesis. However, while such arguments may serve to demonstrate that belief in God is rational, this does not necessarily mean that they would be considered to be convincing by all reasonable non-theists.
>
> (p. 119)

Here McGrath illustrates his two-level thesis of interpretation: the fine-tuning of nature's laws is natural theology's interpretation of cosmological information, and fine-tuning is then interpreted as sufficiently consistent with Christianity's theism. The way that cosmologists deny that fine-tuning is evident in the known facts, and skeptics find cosmology's account insufficient for inferring that a Creator was involved, cannot render natural theology unreasonable. The inability of non-theists to understand how the universe's origins are expected signs of divine agency is easily explained: they are not in the Christian interpretative community. McGrath is also in the company of Calvinist theologians who have asserted that human cognition only properly functions for Christian theists.[25]

Can Natural Theology Evade Atheology?

It can be conceded that McGrath's two-level approach to interpretation probably guarantees that any scientific field can be rendered congruent with whatever sort of theism is desired. A field's evidence base and theories can be reformatted into a perspective on nature that is incomplete without a supernatural being's involvement, and that needed relationship to a supernatural being can be suitably refined into a connection with Christian trinitarianism. So long as "interpretation" is flexible (as it is in McGrath's hands), what factual or logical constraints could prevent these paired interpretative stages from reaching their intended culmination? Thorough-going consistency among many propositions is not so difficult to achieve if the meaning of their terms can be generously adjusted. The general epistemic criterion of coherence is renowned for its generosity to a practically unlimited number of alternative worldviews. Nevertheless, Scientific atheology still has legitimate criticisms to offer. Philosophical reflections on McGrath's Christian

natural theology reveal several major problems for his project.

The first problem looks more closely at this project's notion of 'nature' side-by-side with its reliance upon general coherence. McGrath assures us that 'nature' itself is not accurately describable by any possible conceptual framework. He feels quite sure about this: "There is no neutral standpoint, no universal viewpoint" (p. 32). This all sounds like there could be no "God's-eye point of view" on nature, to use another oft-used phrase from philosophy. But we may ask, How does the Creator conceive of nature? Even if the Creator's design for nature remains beyond the human intellect, that cannot mean that there is no structure to nature. Theism would not allow the Creator to establish nature without bestowing some form and structure. However, McGrath is less interested in God's viewpoint on nature, and more interested in ours. Designs, he claims, are the possession of interpretative communities. An inability to conceive of nature without conceptions would be part of the human condition, after all. He invokes John Henry Newman's view that "our epistemic situation was such that we had to approach the natural world in the light of an informing 'mental map' derived from revelation, rather than try to derive a mental map from an amorphous and ambiguous natural world." McGrath then quotes Newman: "I believe in design because I believe in God; not in God because I see design" (p. 33). This absolute dependency on some interpretative framework or another to think about nature has three serious consequences: (1) 'nature' is just a meaningless 'thing-in-itself' placing no constraints on better or worse ways to think about it; (2) there are no external constraints on an interpretative framework to expose where a community may be mistaken; and (3) there are no objective methods available to a community divided over some point of interpretation for reasonably resolving the issue. Any Christian community claiming to possess an authentic body of revelation is as legitimate as any other, by McGrath's thesis of interpretation. It is impossible for any church to prove that it holds the genuine body of revelatory knowledge, and Christians are well aware that revelation has always been more of a source of division than unity. That in turn renders the theological notion of "the Christian Church" as amorphous as nature.

The second major problem for McGrath's project involves his continual appeals to revelation as the primary mode of interpretation. Where does revelation arrive from? Asserting that revelation comes from God must be as meaningless as claiming that science comes from nature. 'God' rests in the same external situation as 'nature', and a god is as good as a 'thing-in-itself'. There could be as many gods as revelations, or 'nature' could be the real source of revelations. McGrath's project has no way to rule out these possibilities. His kind of Christians do not have to, of course, since a Christian's church will dictate which kind of god is delivering the right revelations. However, Christian theology, no less than atheology, would be justified in doubting whether McGrath's project really brings anyone closer to the One True God within the One True Church. His avowal that he self-consciously

works within the Reformed tradition of Protestantism lends no confidence to his façade of ecumenism. Of what use is it to speak of the Church in the singular? Perhaps enthusiasts for his project should drop the notion of One True God and adopt a liberal and pluralistic perspective on the divine. His project even lends theological consent to the pursuit of the sacred within the realm of nature.

Scientific atheology can add that scientific communities do not suffer from these problems faced by McGrath's interpretive communities. Experimental methodologies are constrained by nature's ways, even if hypotheses about experimental results are expressed in relatively fluid vocabularies. Scientific subfields can operate fairly independently, yet their ontologies must be coordinated. The geneticist, the molecular biologist, and the organic chemist can see how they are all learning about genes, for example. There is a degree of scientific realism involved with this mutual knowledge, a flexible and fallible realism that is not imposed a priori by some science-wide maxim. Regardless of McGrath's repeated invocations of figures such as Thomas Kuhn and Ian Barbour, scientific anti-realism never was a dominant view in the social sciences, much less any other science, or in philosophy of science. His invocations of quantum mechanical "complementarity" are no help, since the field of quantum mechanics is unified about its vast explanatory power, and it is strongly realistic about nature obeying highly confirmed quantum laws, even if quantum mechanics cannot satisfy older realist criteria about locality and strict determinism.[26]

McGrath's broad toleration for alternate theories of the world sends his project towards a third major problem. Christianity is supposed to supply an overview of nature for Christians. Earth's situation cannot be a trivial matter. This is an issue for natural theology, per McGrath, and natural theology must look to revelation first. Does revelation say that the earth is at the center of the universe, or not? Does revelation says that the Earth is less than 10,000 years old? According to McGrath's project, what science says about the Earth does not determine natural theology's interpretation more than revelation. If McGrath's Church agreed with Martin Luther and John Calvin that geocentrism and Young Earth Creationism are valid, then natural theology would reinterpret most of modern astronomy and geology accordingly. Tracts from denominations adhering to strict Biblical literalism already show the way. However, McGrath's critical eye stays focused on certain sciences. He seems satisfied with current cosmology, since it sounds like Christianity's "Let there be light" account in Genesis, so he does not label the Big Bang theory as an atheist fabrication. However, if cosmology had settled on the "steady-state theory" which suggests an eternal universe, or cosmology someday prefers the "oscillating universe theory" that allows an infinite succession of universes, would McGrath still find cosmology so neutral? McGrath would have no choice but to castigate those scientific cosmologies as atheist interpretations and call for natural theology to reinterpret those theories away from naturalism to guarantee the need for a

Creator. Fortunately for today's cosmology, it is not deemed to be atheistic. Biology finds itself in a very different situation. McGrath tells us,

> From our discussion of the religious aspects of modern cosmology, it will be clear that the physical sciences offer significant and positive grounds for dialogue between science and religion. The situation is quite different in relation to the biological sciences. . . .[27]

Apparently god can be "seen" in the heavens but not on the earth, at least the earth that biology sees. McGrath forebears from dismissing geology as just a naturalistic interpretation, but that is because he reads his Bible one way rather than another. The problem for McGrath's project now comes into clear focus: his elaborate rationale for deciding which sciences need radical reinterpretation has little to do with understanding what the sciences are learning, but everything to do with what McGrath thinks that his Bible is revealing.

McGrath's interpretative selectivity leaves his theology vulnerable to a fourth problem. Is his selectivity ultimately hostage to the vagaries of broader cultural drifts? Imagine a sixteenth-century theologian utilizing McGrath's theological project: Copernican astronomy must not be taken realistically, but only as a mathematical model that does not accurately depict the Earth's true location. Next, imagine an eighteenth-century theologian applying McGrath's theology: geology must not be taken realistically, because its naturalistic accounts of slow change omit the divinely-caused catastrophes in the Bible. McGrath happened to find his theology in twentieth-century Protestantism—could that be the real basis to his approach to natural theology? The long march of cultural change and inter-cultural exchange leaves nothing untouched, including Christian conceptions of God and Christianity's theological dogmas. The possibility that Christianity could become largely satisfied with unguided natural selection may not be troubling McGrath's nightmares, but similarly dramatic accommodations of science have transformed Christianity over its two-millennia history, as he must acknowledge. Scientific atheology approves of such transformations, so long as new scientific knowledge is speedily accepted without distortion, but McGrath's project confronts and contorts selected sciences by taking just one Protestant perspective on the Bible. His theology expects natural theology to impose one cultural era's balance of comfort with science upon all Christianity across all eras. This is not a reasonable basis for a stable compromise between science and religion. In conclusion, these four problems show that McGrath's view of natural theology cannot evade criticism from Scientific atheology.

McGrath is no relativist about revelation, but he is not insensitive to the relativism inherent in his interpretive project. He even suggests that beauty and goodness guide religiosity as much or more than truth. Religion may amount in the end to sublime poetry, as some great religious thinkers have suggested

and McGrath himself intimates.[28] Atheology would shift into a less confrontational dialogue with an aesthetic theology. Neither reason nor science are arbiters of beauty and artistic value, and art cannot regulate reason and science.

Notes

1 Works covering the primary tasks of scientific atheology include Drees, *Religion, Science and Naturalism* (1996); Nielsen, *Naturalism and Religion* (2001); Edis, *Science and Nonbelief* (2006); Stenger, *God, The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (2007); and Stenger, *The Fallacy of Fine-Tuning: Why the Universe Is Not Designed for Us* (2011).

2 Physicist John Polkinghorne illustrates the theological strategy of making theism look plausible by equating naturalism with hasty reductionisms, all the while picking and choosing from well-confirmed science just the information he expects to keep trinitarian theism plausible. See his books *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (1998) and *Theology in the Context of Science* (2009). Examples of broader theological explorations are Bartholomew, *God, Chance, and Purpose: Can God Have It Both Ways?* (2008), and Wegter-McNelly, *The Entangled God: Divine Relationality and Quantum Physics* (2012).

3 Consult Fales, "Naturalism and Physicalism" (2007). This author recommends non-reductive and pragmatic naturalism, which is indebted to classical pragmatists such as John Dewey and analytic pragmatists indebted to W.V. Quine. Heirs of this naturalism include Ladyman and Ross, *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized* (2007) and *Huw Price, Naturalism Without Mirrors* (2011). Major kinds of naturalism are compared in Shook, "Varieties of Twentieth Century American Naturalism" (2011).

4 Twenty-six types of scientism from minimal to maximal receive their rankings in Shook, "Spelling Out Scientism, A–Z" (2015).

5 Only a selective grouping of works engaged with current science can be mentioned here, starting with panentheism: Clayton, ed., *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World* (2004); Clayton and Davies, ed., *The Re-Emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis From Science to Religion* (2006); and Kauffman, *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason, and Religion* (2010). Relating to panpsychism: Clarke, *Panpsychism and the Religious Attitude* (2003); Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* (2017), and Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness* (2007). On process theology, see Cobb and Pinnock, ed., *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists* (2000), and Epperly, *Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2011). Additional philosophical theologies and cosmologies are explored in Kasher and Diller, ed., *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities* (2013). For surveys of controversies not only between naturalism and theism, but also between non-supernaturalistic theologies, see these works: Wiebe, *The Irony of Theology and the Nature of Religious Thought* (1991); Drees, *Religion, Science, and Naturalism* (1996); Clayton, *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* (2000); Barnes, *Stages of Thought: The Co-Evolution of Religious Thought and Science* (2000); Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion* (2000); Lindberg and Numbers, ed., *When Science and Christianity Meet* (2003); Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (2006); Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit: God, World, Divine Action* (2008); and Oord, ed., *Theologies of Creation: Creatio Ex Nihilo and Its New Rivals* (2014).

6 Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?* (1998), p. 81, 82.
7 Readers must forgive this adumbrated portrayal of scientific methodology. It omits differences among the sciences and distorts stages to experimental consideration, to highlight three distinct ways that a proposal can be classified as non-scientific: (1) a proposal only offers to explain random-like occurrences with an ad hoc agent; (2) a proposal resists experimental testing by retaining non-explanatory features; or (3) a proposal fails experimental testing.
8 On naturalism and the uniformity of nature, the reader can consult the overviews provided by Dilworth, *The Metaphysics of Science: An Account of Modern Science in Terms of Principles, Laws and Theories* (1996), chap. 2, and Ladyman, *Understanding Philosophy of Science* (2002), chap. 2. On philosophy of religion and theology regarding miracles, see Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle* (1970); Corner, ed., *The Philosophy of Miracles* (2007); and Twelftree, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles* (2011).
9 Lennox, *God and Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?* (2011), pp. 91–93. For his part, Hawking alluded to knowing the mind of God by discovering the scientific theory of everything in *A Brief History of Time* (1988). In 2014 he clarified his atheism for the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo*: "What I meant by 'we would know the mind of God' is we would know everything that God would know if there was a God, but there isn't. I'm an atheist." This quotation was reprinted at www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/25/stephen-hawking-atheist_n_5882860.html.
10 Humean arguments against miracles are discussed by Fogelin, *A Defense of Hume on Miracles* (2003).
11 There has been no finer scientific investigator of miracles and the paranormal than master skeptic Joe Nickell. Among his many books, one can start with *The Science of Miracles: Investigating the Incredible* (2013), and *The Science of Ghosts: Searching for Spirits of the Dead* (2012).
12 See for example Kurtz, ed., *Skeptical Odysseys: Personal Accounts by the World's Leading Paranormal Inquirers* (2001), and Frazier, ed., *Science Under Siege: Defending Science, Exposing Pseudoscience* (2009). See also Bridgstock, *Beyond Belief: Skepticism, Science and the Paranormal* (2009), and Pigliucci and Boudry, ed., *The Philosophy of Pseudoscience* (2013).
13 Consult Kosso, *A Summary of Scientific Method* (2011), and Pigliucci, *Nonsense on Stilts: How to Tell Science From Bunk* (2010). See also Howison, *Objecting to God* (2011), chap. 3. Swinburne's application of probability theory is in *The Existence of God* (2004). Atheological examinations of Bayesian calculations for a god are provided by Dawes, *Theism and Explanation* (2009), chaps. 6 and 7.
14 Discussions of divine action in the world, along with philosophical opportunities and obstacles for theology, are provided by Saunders, *Divine Action and Modern Science* (2002); Russell et al., ed., *God's Action in Nature's World* (2006); and Shults et al., ed., *Philosophy, Science and Divine Action* (2009).
15 Critiques of intelligent design are included in Pennock, *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives* (2001); Shanks, *God, The Devil, and Darwin: A Critique of Intelligent Design Theory* (2006); and Edis and Young, ed., *Why Intelligent Design Fails: A Scientific Critique of the New Creationism* (2006).
16 Gray, *Natural Selection Not Inconsistent With Natural Theology* (1861), p. 36.
17 For searching critiques of both Creationism and Intelligent Design, consult Pigliucci, *Denying Evolution: Creationism, Scientism, and the Nature of Science* (2002). A classic of creationism is Morris, ed., *Scientific Creationism* (1974).

18 Dembski, "The Logical Underpinnings of Intelligent Design" (2004), pp. 322–323.
19 Huxley, *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis* (1974). Pigliucci and Müller, ed., *Evolution: The Extended Synthesis* (2010). On Darwinian evolution's early phases of controversy with natural theology, see Lustig, "Natural Atheology" (2004), and Ruse, *Darwin and Design: Does Evolution Have a Purpose?* (2003).
20 Consult Hooker, ed., *Philosophy of Complex Systems* (2011), and Paolini and Paoletti, ed., *Philosophical and Scientific Perspectives on Downward Causation* (2017).
21 See Dembski, *No Free Lunch: Why Specified Complexity Cannot Be Purchased Without Intelligence* (2006), pp. 243–247. See also Behe, *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism* (2007).
22 Consult Petto and Godfrey, ed., *Scientists Confront Intelligent Design and Creationism* (2007), and Pennock and Ruse, ed., *But Is It Science? The Philosophical Question in the Creation/Evolution Controversy* (2009).
23 The reader can start with Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument* (2008). See also Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (1994).
24 McGrath and McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (2007). Calling atheism or naturalism as a 'religion' is now a familiar but fallacious tactic. See for example Hunter, *Science's Blind Spot: The Unseen Religion of Scientific Naturalism* (2007).
25 McGrath, *Science and Religion: A New Introduction* (2011), chap. 24. See also McCauley, *Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not* (2011).
26 Physicists and philosophers occasionally speak of quantum mechanics as "anti-realistic" to distance it from traditional realist criteria, not to say that quantum physics is contrary to scientific realism. See Whitaker, *Einstein, Bohr and the Quantum Dilemma: From Quantum Theory to Quantum Information* (2006).
27 McGrath, *Science and Religion: An Introduction* (1999), p. 186.
28 McGrath, *The Open Secret* (2011), pp. 248–252.

9 Moral Atheology

This chapter surveys Moral atheology across Western thought. Moral atheology criticizes commitments to deities that encourage religious followers to violate moral norms which humanity should respect. Its five core strategies, outlined in initial sections, explain why gods involved with immoralities should be abandoned and show how morality can be disconnected from piety. The "unworthy gods" strategy criticizes religious conviction in a god as unjustifiable where that conviction requires immorality. The "unreliable religions" strategy criticizes religions collectively because they cannot guarantee that piety ensures morality. The "moral atheists" strategy holds that most nonreligious people can be as moral as any religious person. The "naturalizing morality" strategy emphasizes morality's natural basis in the history of humanity's origins and cultural development. The "validating morality" strategy explains the validity of morality through nonreligious methods so that gods, and god-belief, are irrelevant to morality.

This categorization of Moral atheology strategies discriminates among philosophical stances concerning religion and morality far better than any list of atheist philosophers. Moral atheology has a long and complex history in Western thought, going back to the Presocratics. The appearances of the primary strategies of Moral atheology during Ancient, Hellenistic, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Modern eras are surveyed in the middle sections, followed by a classification of important moral atheologians. Sketches of effective Moral atheology arguments constitute the final sections of this chapter.

Strategies of Moral Atheology

Typical criticisms targeting religious people or denominations appeal to moral standards prevailing in the society of the critic. Accusations of immoral stands or deeds might diminish the stature of their human targets, and may in the long run contribute to religious reform and ethical improvement. Moral atheology appeals to moral norms valid for all humanity, and directs its criticisms at an unearthly target. It demands disbelief in the god(s) behind immoral religious institutions, practices, and devotions.[1]

The basic form to Moral atheology's argument is: "Following that religion's god involves agreeing with a violation of objective morality, but it is unjustifiable and unreasonable to accept that immoral violation, so belief in that god should be abandoned." This argument is not merely about faulting gods for falling short of reasonable moral standards. Moral atheology primarily faults religious believers for failing to prioritize reasonable morality over religious faith. Devotion is no excuse.

Moral atheology does not expect to show that no gods exist due to any list, no matter how large, of divine misdeeds. Yet those misdeeds cannot be ignored or excused: gods engaging in vices, gods ignoring human welfare, gods allowing evil to abound, gods encouraging immoral deeds, and gods commanding immoral acts. Moral atheology urges that devotion (whether labeled as 'piety', 'trust,' 'faith', 'belief', and so on) to a god allowing or requiring moral violations is a commitment that should be abandoned. How bad does divine behavior have to be?

Moral atheology appeals to normative standards for healthy human lives, basic moral norms, and reasonable social ethics—standards approved by civil societies and endorsed by most of the world's religions. Modest global consensus, while falling short of unanimity, has long been available about important moral matters, even if religious ethics and secular ethics cannot agree about everything. Moral atheology does not have to wait for philosophies of ethics to converge in unified agreement, or for a naturalistic account of morality to emerge as superior. Enough of the world understands fundamental rights and wrongs. Any religion's god countenancing or encouraging murder, genocide, slavery, subjugation, self-degradation, suicide, terror, anarchy, harm to innocents, and so on, is not a god worthy of anyone's devotion.

What outcome does Moral atheology seek? The pious need not abruptly espouse atheism. Reasonably moral believers can modify their conception of their god, suitably adjusting ideas about god to survive Moral atheology's scrutiny. Capable theology does not overlook valid atheology. Much of religious ethics consists of either applying Moral atheology's tests to promote reform, or at least anticipating Moral atheology's critiques. Religious ethics can offer selective apologetics, scriptural hermeneutics, speculative theodicies, and so forth, to exculpate a deity from involvement with immorality. Some religions can ignore Moral atheology, because they worship impersonal god(s) taking no interest in right and wrong, or vaguely benevolent god(s) never judging anyone about morality. A god truly remote from all immorality, or a god aloof from moral matters entirely, is not a target for Moral atheology.

Moral atheology's basic argument can be formulated as like this: "Following that religion's god involves agreeing with a violation of objective morality, but it is unjustifiable and unreasonable to accept that immoral violation, so belief in that god should be abandoned." That argument is joined by four specific strategies to severely question religion's ability to encourage morality.

First, Moral atheology can distance morality from piety, by explaining how no religion is in a reasonable position to claim that it understands morality between than any other religion, or any nonreligious worldview. If religious ethics points to the excellence of the morality backed by a religion, Moral atheology points to that moral code's faults, contradictions, and omissions, or Moral atheology can point out numerous disagreements among religions. What does any religion truly know about moral matters? A religion may declare that its creedal core, alone among all religions, does get morality right.[2] Moral atheology's unbiased survey over religious moralities is unable to confirm that narrow assessment.

Second, Moral atheology can disconnect morality from piety, by explaining how a nonreligious person can be satisfactorily moral to illustrate how piety is not necessary for morality. Religion's defenders who are reticent about depicting their own religion as morally ideal can still claim that the religious life in general provides for morality while the nonreligious life cannot. An admission that people must be religious to be moral would dramatically weaken the force of arguments against god-belief in the name of upholding morality. Moral atheology therefore points to ample evidence from history and the world today about nonreligious people who have exemplified moral lives.[3]

Third, Moral atheology can isolate morality from piety, by accounting for human morality in entirely nonreligious terms. In modern times, religions seem less skeptical about the existence of moral unbelievers. The question remains, How do any unbelievers manage to be moral? Religious ethics may argue that divine guidance and long religious inculcation explains how moral societies are sustained. Nonbelievers simply imitate religious morality and motivate moral choices through quasi-religious substitutes, unable to invent or sustain morality by themselves. Moral atheology accordingly argues that morality is something that can be sustained without any religious instruction or guidance. Religions have helped to inculcate their preferred moral codes for so long that they confidently take credit for inventing morality, or at least preventing morality's collapse. Moral atheology can point to several heavily secular countries today to respond to the oft-repeated challenge, "Show us one civil yet nonreligious society." Moral atheology can also point to accounts of morality's natural history, a history proving to be far older than religion, to show why morality could flourish in religion's absence.[4]

Fourth, Moral atheology can elevate morality above piety, by accounting for morality's validity with reasonable methods that do not require premised convictions about deities or established loyalties to religion. Morality's independent validity explains how human societies can comprehend its nonreligious basis, understand the ground of moral obligation, and respect morality's authority, without appealing to (tacitly presuming) anything religious, sacred, divine, transcendent, and/or supernatural. The theological position that only a worldview including a deity can validate morality's truth and obligatory status[5] is reviewed and rejected by Moral atheology.

Summarizing, five primary strategies available to Moral atheology can erode god-belief in the name of upholding morality. The "unworthy gods" strategy criticizes religious conviction in a god as unreasonable where that conviction involves immorality. The "unreliable religions" strategy criticizes religions collectively because they cannot guarantee that piety ensures morality. The "moral atheists" strategy holds that most nonreligious people can be as moral as any religious person. The "naturalize morality" strategy emphasizes morality's natural basis in the history of humanity's origins and cultural development. The "validate morality" strategy explains the validity of morality through nonreligious methods so that gods, and god-belief, are irrelevant. All five strategies appeared among ancient thinkers, and these strategies developed into their robust forms after the Renaissance.

Moral Atheology's Heritage

The Presocratics established many foundations to philosophical thinking, and basic strategies for atheology as well. During the sixth century BCE, Anaximander's naturalistic perspective opened up vistas for subsequent Greek philosophers to view religion as a human creation if nature neither needs gods nor births gods. The poet Xenophanes, also from the sixth century and familiar with Anaximander, assembled the first Western Moral atheology: reasoning suggests a divine guidance within nature unconcerned with humanity's moral affairs; the world's religions are ignorant about what the divine does or wants; religions reflect the preferences and prejudices of different nations; and religions about anthropomorphic gods harm society by inculcating poor moral ideals.[6]

Complaints about the immoralities and indecencies of popular religion could be heard from sophists and dramatists during the era of Socrates and Plato, such as Euripides (c.480–406 BCE). Socrates (469–399 BCE) was notorious for criticizing the many ways that Greek myths depict the vanities and vices of the gods. Plato (427–347 BCE) took a firm stand against impiety; *The Republic* and *Laws* are especially concerned with dutiful religiosity. Impiety and atheism are dangerous because deviations from the proper public worship of the community's gods are a threat to sound morality and civic order. However, Plato endorsed some Moral atheology tactics. He denied that the gods worshipped by the multitudes reliably exemplify virtue and moral excellence; he denied that those popular gods ever existed to inspire religion or deliver morality; and he argued that the validity of morality does not directly rest on religious piety. The common people should be pious towards fictional but ethical gods, as approved by philosophy, to help sustain social harmony.[7]

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) agreed with Plato that popular religions are fictional, only philosophy's wisdom guides the good life, and piety cannot determine morality or immortality. Neither the blissfully contemplative gods guiding celestial motions nor the Prime Mover energizing the cosmos

provide providential guidance over human affairs, or the promulgation of morality. Aristotle expected human intelligence to be sufficient for validating virtue and maintaining civic order without divine help or religion's support. As for religion, Aristotle says almost nothing, except to suggest improvements to legends, portray religion as tool for governing, and admit that good religion can support morality. Only a lingering reliance upon what came to be known as a natural law theory for discerning morality's basis in humanity's created form kept Aristotle from exemplifying the full set of Moral atheology strategies.[8]

Between the Presocratics and the trio of Socrates-Plato-Aristotle, Greek thought witnessed the establishment of all five strategies of Moral atheology. After Aristotle, intellectuals discussing religion had to address this crucial question: what good are the gods for morality? Strato of Lampsacus (c.335–270 BCE), the third leader of Aristotle's Lyceum after Theophrastus, taught a materialistic philosophy and a nonreligious ethics, denying any role for gods or any reality to an immortal soul. The school inaugurated by Epicurus (c.341–271 BCE) in 306 BCE said that gods exist, but Epicurean 'gods' are gods in name only and have nothing to do with morality. Epicureans sought an ethical and peaceful life free from anxieties, hatreds, and fears—the placid condition of tranquility called ataraxia (ἀταραξία)—so no beliefs in cosmic destiny, divine providence, godly decrees, heavenly portends, fortunate afterlives, or personal immortality should be accepted. The Stoics did not credit the gods with inventing morality or encouraging morality among humanity, although the gods do have providential roles within the cosmos. Against the Stoics, who perpetuated Platonic and Aristotelian theories about divine intelligences guiding the cosmos towards good ends, the Epicureans protested that even divine providence enslaved humanity to a fate beyond its control. Morality is entirely a matter of human wisdom, focused on this mortal life.[9]

Among the Romans, Lucretius, Cicero, and Lucian contributed to Moral atheology. Lucretius, who composed the Epicurean masterpiece *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things) in the first century CE, was abidingly antagonistic against all superstition, religion, and cultish practices, liberating the ethical life from any reliance on piety.[10] Cicero (106–43 BCE) represented moderate Academic skepticism in his dialogue *De natura deorum* (On the Nature of the Gods, composed in 45 BCE), and pondered whether the gods may be too aloof from earthly affairs to supply any guidance over moral matters.[11] Lucian (c.125–185 CE) was a literary moralist who satirized superstitions and castigated pious immoralities in such writings as *Dialogues of the Gods*.

Some free-thinking and even a modest degree of atheology developed during the Renaissance, even if atheists were scarce. All five strategies of Moral atheology survived in robust forms, embodied in such rediscovered works as Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*, Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, and texts by Sextus Empiricus.

The great humanist Erasmus (1466–1536) opened up many pathways for re-thinking the spiritual and ethical relationship between god and humanity. He translated many Greek authors, but his favorite was probably the satirist and moralist Lucian, and Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (1511) elevated Renaissance prose to the level of Lucian's wit. A kindred spirit in Christian humanism was fellow moralist François Rabelais (c.1494–1553), another translator and admirer of Lucian. Rabelais's novels about Gargantua and Pantagruel published during 1532–52 permitted comedic characters to utter querulous criticisms of pious religiosity and express anti-clerical sentiments, satirizing narrow-minded morals and dogmatic religion to an extent not seen since Lucian.[12]

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) boldly intimated that god-belief was beneath any intellectual's dignity and earned his reputation for sympathizing with atheism. He knew Epicureanism well, having copied out Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* for himself. His works *The Prince* (1513) and *Discourses* (1531) do not openly endorse materialism or irreligion, and they approve the simplistic piety of the common people. However, his works expansively theorize about ethics, civil order, and state power through anthropological and historical perspectives without appealing to religious dogma or divine authority. An admitted atheist and patron of Machiavelli's, Filippo Strozzi (1488–1538), may have been one of the deathbed visitors who heard Machiavelli's final wish to join the company of philosophers in hell instead of the poor in heaven, a tale oft-repeated by detractors.[13]

Nowhere does Machiavelli endorse the idea that a nonreligious population could be moral or governable. The mere toleration of nonbelievers was practically as unthinkable during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the existence of atheists. Envisioning religious toleration was ambitious enough for the most far-sighted authors. Thomas More (1478–1535) combined religious toleration with the non-persecution of atheists in *Utopia* (1516) by envisioning a foreign land with vaguely strange but reasonable ways. Towards the end of the sixteenth century some overseas missionaries wrote about 'pagan' religions around the world, and Jean de Léry's account in 1578 of his travels in Brazil included a report of a few tribal peoples lacking all belief in a god. Within decades, a flood of reports from around the world confirmed how indigenous peoples from the Americas to China and Japan could be discovered to lack belief in some sort of high god (although superstitions seemed universal enough). The theological argument for god from "universal consent" that all humanity acknowledges one supreme god was placed under increasing pressure. The moral theology argument for god from humanity's reliance upon god for morality was soon eroding as well. François de La Mothe Le Vayer's *De la Vertu des Païens* (1641) recounted Chinese social ethics and described Confucius as China's 'Socrates'. The first large-scale translation of Confucian texts, in Philip Couplet's edition titled *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687), was noted by many European

intellectuals including Leibniz and Thomasius. But it was the German rationalist Christian Wolff who stepped directly into the controversy. His 1721 address titled *Oratio de Sinarum philosophia practica* (Discourse on Chinese Practical Philosophy) suggested that the Chinese could not have known the true God, but their natural reason supplied an authentic morality and political order. Wolff stopped short of affirming that a large non-Christian society could be as moral as a Christian society, but he was accused of atheism and deprived of his academic position for many years.[14]

Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza mark a transitional phase for modern thought, and atheology especially. Hobbes's worldview, detailed in *Leviathan* (1651), relegated all religions and their gods to popular fantasy by his materialist, skeptical, moral, and civic system. Hobbes skeptically denied religion as an authority, either over one's intelligence or all society. Faith in popular religion would remain useful among the ignorant masses all the same, so long as the sovereign, not the priests or theologians, controlled popular religion for political ends.[15] Spinoza exemplified Moral atheology's skepticism towards revealed religions and their divine commandments in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670). His *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata* (1677) attempted to demonstrate how ethics can be rationally grounded without religion's assistance.[16]

Bayle's *Pensées diverses sur la comète* (Various Thoughts on the Occasion of the Comet, 1682) was the first philosophical work in Europe to suggest that a society of atheists need not be immoral and disorderly, although he could not see how atheism is preferable to virtuous Christianity. Three prominent philosophers of the early eighteenth century, Lord Shaftesbury (1671–1713), Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733), and Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), suggested that nonbelievers can individually be virtuous since human nature was hardly so depraved as Protestantism taught. Nevertheless, they also agreed society requires faithful religion to reinforce civic morals.[17] Alternative viewpoints were also heard, questioning whether pious religiosity could really be so moral. Criticisms of religion's immoralities and denouncements of the Church were nowhere more forcefully stated during the early eighteenth century than in the heretical and anti-clerical book of a Catholic priest. Jean Meslier's *Mémoire* (1729) bitterly exposed religion's frauds and hypocrisies, leaving humanity vulnerable to every sort of immoral and unethical scheme devised by the powerful.

> All the laws and orders that are issued in the name and authority of God or the gods are really only human inventions . . . invented by shrewd and crafty politicians, afterward cultivated and multiplied by the false seducers and charlatans, then accepted blindly by the ignorant, and finally supported and authorized by the laws of the princes and rulers of the earth who used these human inventions to keep a tight rein on the community of men and do with them what they wanted.[18]

The "New Science" of Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), published in treatises during the 1720s–1740s, further encouraged Moral and Civil atheology. He forged a natural history of civil society, not only inventing the fields of philosophy of history and the history of mythology, but also depicting religion as a phase of civilization's progress rather than an abrupt revelation at the beginning of creation. Atheism for Vico is not only thinkable, it is the original and natural state. The first proto-humans, Vico hypothesized, were neither fearful of nature nor in need of religion. Despite Vico's affirmations of his Christian principles, orthodox critics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries deplored his depiction of god as an impersonal stimulus to historical change, his scholarly treatment of cultural myth and the Bible, and his anti-clerical disregard for sacred theology and sacred history.[19]

During the Enlightenment, models of secularist atheology became congruent with ongoing Enlightenment trends. Optimistic theories of ethics and politics, such as social contractarianism (John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau), Scottish sentimentalism (Lord Shaftesbury, Frances Hutcheson, and Adam Smith), and utilitarian consequentialism (Jeremy Bentham and John Mill), allowed intellectuals to conduct Moral atheology, especially the strategies of naturalizing and validating morality, without being known primarily as atheists. This Enlightenment era of Moral atheology accordingly encompasses Jean-Jacques Rousseau's sentimentalist religiosity and moralist philosophy (*Du contrat social*, 1762), Voltaire's deism and satirical wit (*Dictionnaire philosophique*, 1764–70), Edward Gibbon's historicism and skepticism (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776–89), and Ethan Allen's rationalism (*Reason: The Only Oracle of Man*, 1785).[20]

A few prominent materialists willingly accepted the label of 'atheist'. La Mettrie's book *L'Homme machine* (Man the Machine, 1747) took Moral atheology to its natural end. La Mettrie was the first atheist in Europe to argue both that atheism is the correct worldview and that a society of atheists would be more moral than any religious society.

> . . . materialists pay homage that everyone else unjustly refuses to natural gifts, which are the source of everything that is acquired . . . the convinced materialist, though his own vanity whispers in his ear that he is only a machine or an animal, will not mistreat his fellows. Knowing too well that the inhumanity of their actions is always proportional to their needs, in a word, following the natural law given to all animals, he does want to do unto others what he would not want them to do unto him.[21]

La Mettrie's claim that humanity's natural origins supplies the moral instincts and sociability required for civil society (excepting only a government, to be designed by natural reason), was the model for later moral and civil atheologies. They undertook nonreligious explanations for the natural capacity to be habitually moral and social, and the capacity for human culture to progressively develop, despite the retrograde effects of religion.

This tradition continued with the next notorious materialist, Baron D'Holbach. D'Holbach announced not only that impiety is no threat to sound morality and the civil order, but also that theistic religion is a major source of immorality and uncivility: "atheism, if well understood, is founded upon nature and reason, which never will, like religion, either justify or expiate the crimes of the wicked." Furthermore, atheism cannot by itself cause immorality. "Whether there exists a God, or whether he exists not, our duties will be the same; and our nature, if consulted, will prove, *that vice is an evil, and that virtue is a real and substantial good*."[22] In D'Holbach's works, a complete secularist atheology was in place: religion was a human invention, that has long been more harmful than beneficial for personal morality or civic order.

David Hume (1711–76) was no materialist, making his skeptical contributions to atheology in *Natural History of Religion* (1757) and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779). However, his Moral atheology was on display long before he engaged theology. In *Treatise of Human Nature* (1738, Book 3, "Of Morals") and *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), Hume nowhere appeals to deities or pieties to understand or validate morality, tracking its foundation to features of human nature.[23] This atheological confidence in our natural capacity to commonsensically lead ethical lives was not deterred by the position of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) that faith in a heavenly god is necessary for moral action on earth. His *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (1793) suggested to many defenders of faith that only people energized by convictions that inner moral evil can be overcome and moral deeds have ultimate worth (convictions supposedly requiring faith in god) would be the people doing enough good in society now.[24] Yet this pious claim was soon regarded as an empirically testable proposition as the eighteenth century began and modernity took shape.

Modern Moral Atheology

Marquis de Condorcet (1743–94), a mathematician, scientist, and economist, frequently contributed articles for Diderot's famous *Encyclopédie*. Responding to an attack on the liberal views expressed there, Condorcet anonymously published *Lettres d'un théologien* (1774) to condemn the entire clerical establishment, defend religious toleration, praise political equality for all, including women, and call for universal human rights. Voltaire had to promptly deny authorship for its hostility towards all religion, even deism; Condorcet describes his sympathy with atheism in a 1775 letter to Voltaire.[25] Condorcet consistently allotted to science alone all knowledge of nature and society, never hinting at any divine hand behind it all. His *L'Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1795, translated as *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind* in 1796), along with his later writings, advanced the atheological project of applying human sciences such as medicine, anthropology, and

sociology for replacing religion and its barbaric remedies for human ills.

Speaking of his own age, and the free-thinking *philosophes* of which he was proud to belong, he wrote:

> Thus there prevailed a general knowledge of the natural rights of man; the opinion even that these rights are inalienable and imprescriptible; a decided partiality for freedom of thinking and writing; for the enfranchisement of industry and commerce; for the melioration of the condition of the people; for the repeal of penal statutes against religious nonconformists; for the abolition of torture and barbarous punishments; the desire of a milder system of criminal legislation; of a jurisprudence that should give to innocence a complete security; of a civil code more simple, as well as more conformable to reason and justice; indifference as to systems of religion, considered at length as the offspring of superstition, or ranked in the number of political inventions; hatred of hypocrisy and fanaticism; contempt for prejudices; and lastly, a zeal for the propagation of truth.[26]

Condorcet proved to be a key transitional figure. As the nineteenth century opened, Moral and Civil atheology displayed more confidence that the cultural progress of humanity is due to reason, and the scientific worldview should classify religion as ignorant superstition.

The writings of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), Auguste Comte (1798–1857), and Karl Marx (1818–83) during the first half of the nineteenth century exemplified that modernist confidence in progress, often imitated by subsequent atheist social theorists. They approved materialistic atheism and criticized religion for its decadence and inhumanism. Yet they also held that skeptical disbelief and irreligion is insufficient to sustain the momentum of humanity's progress—only a positive system of natural science, scientific social theory, and ethical philosophy can ensure further progress. Later moral atheologians wielded their own secular normative standards for ethics, social order, important rights, and good government. These principles powered emerging freethought movements, such as those led by secularist George Holyoake (1817–1906) in England, naturalist Ludwig Büchner (1824–99) in Germany, and feminist Ernestine Rose (1810–92) in America.

The influence of Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution by natural selection inspired fresh impetus to Moral atheology's naturalization of morality. Herbert Spencer exemplified this naturalistic project, calling for the secularization of morals in *The Data of Ethics* (1879) and constructing a naturalistic theory of morality in *The Principles of Ethics* (1892). Would ethics be reducible to whatever promotes human survival? John Stuart Mill grounded ethics on the overall happiness which is naturally good for all people, and denied that religion is required for morality. His essay on the "Utility of Religion," published in *Three Essays on Religion* (1874), explains why religion is no longer needed for comprehending or upholding morality. His theory of morality as embodied in important social rules,

and his ethical theory grounding the rightness of an act in its promotion of happiness, makes no reference to anything religious or divine. His *Utilitarianism* (1861) held religious acts and duties to the same ethical standard as anything having public effects, so utilitarian ethics overrules religious ethics, excepting only in regard to entirely private practices.[27]

Darwin's "bulldog," Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95), struggled with the implications of evolution for morality as deeply as anyone, asking whether the ways of wild nature should dictate the ways of civilized people. How could the conduct proven to be best for only the few truly constitute what is best for all humanity? No single thinker was responsible for Social Darwinism, least of all Darwin or Huxley, but it lent scientific credibility to *laissez-faire* capitalism and eugenics. The late Victorian era also witnessed a counter-evolution rebellion against any naturalization of ethics, as one philosopher after another offered to ground morality in intuition, sentiment, reason, conscience, free will, grace, or anything elevating a person far above animality.[28] Theologians had a similarly straightforward argument to make, claiming that god must provide moral sensibilities to humanity, such as altruism, where nature's harsh laws did not. Naturalizing human morality would have to be undertaken in order to liberate ethics from custom and religion, while atheology undertook the search for secular ways to validate morality.

A cooperative alliance between utilitarianism and secularism was forged by the late 1800s. That alliance prevails to this day; even the ethical humanism of the twentieth century consists mostly of utilitarianism and social liberalism. In America, pragmatic naturalists reconceived ethics as the intelligent improvement of social morality towards greater ends promoting human welfare in the long run. This approach to ethics abandoned religion as irrelevant in two primary ways: pragmatism depicted religion as the custodian of customs only fitting past eras, and denied to religion any capacity for experimenting with novel ways of life. Ethics won't be reliant upon obedience to an authority, either the Creator or the Conscience; ethics won't be grounded in rationalistic systems trying to identify the unique morality for all peoples; and ethics won't be taking perfectionist leaps into utopias – social ethics gradually reconstructs society where relief from suffering and oppression are needed. William James's *The Will to Believe and Other Essays* (1897), George Santayana's *The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress* (1905–06), and John Dewey and James Tufts's *Ethics* (1908) were the most influential writings advancing a naturalistic and secular ethics from pragmatism's early decades. This confidence in secular social ethics in turn grounded pragmatism's justification for participatory democracy, exemplified by Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* (1927).[29]

With confidence that a godless and liberated humanity can understand and enact sound morality and good government, Moral and Civil atheology had fully emerged around the turn of the twentieth century. These two normative atheologies are what most people typically encounter

nowadays, as they meet atheist complaints against religion's unethical and tyrannical tendencies. Prominent atheists have composed moral atheologies against religion, such as Robert Green Ingersoll's *The Gods* (1878), Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), H. L. Mencken's *Treatise on the Gods* (1930), and Jean-Paul Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism" (1945). Bertrand Russell's blunt verdict in "Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?" (1957) is delivered by the opening lines: "My own view on religion is that of Lucretius. I regard it as a disease born of fear and as a source of untold misery to the human race."[30] Paul Kurtz's *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism* (1987) and Christopher Hitchens's *God Is Not Great* (2007) are recent books belonging to this genre.[31]

Although few scientists openly attacked religion and advocated atheism, ample atheology was flourishing. The social and behavior sciences led the way for advancing the naturalizing strategy of Moral atheology: anthropologists such as Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), Franz Boas (1858–1942), Margaret Mead (1901–78), and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009); sociologists Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), Georg Simmel (1858–1918), and Max Weber (1864–1920); along with psychologists William James (1842–1910) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). They all adopted a scientific agnosticism in order to explain religiosity at cultural, political, and personal levels, and to account for morality in entirely naturalistic terms.[32] During the past fifty years, only the naturalizing and validating strategies of Moral atheology have received close philosophical attention. Heirs to neo-Kantianism, utilitarianism, sentimentalism, intuitionism, virtue ethics, and egoism carry on the secular effort to comprehend morality and refine their ethical systems, but they typically show little interest in figuring out what to do with the world's religions. Nevertheless, Moral atheology has accumulated ample resources to mount several kinds of objections to god-belief.

Let us review the five strategies of Moral atheology. The "unworthy gods" strategy criticizes religious conviction in a god as unreasonable where that conviction involves immorality. The "unreliable religions" strategy criticizes religions collectively because they cannot guarantee that piety ensures morality. The "moral atheists" strategy holds that most nonreligious people can be as moral as any religious person. The "naturalize morality" strategy emphasizes morality's natural basis in the history of humanity's origins and cultural development. The "validate morality" strategy explains the validity of morality through nonreligious methods so that gods, and god-belief, are irrelevant.

Classifying significant moral atheologians who utilize one or more of these five strategies results in this list:

> Unworthy gods: Xenophanes, Euripedes, Diagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Cicero, Lucretius, Carneades, Varro, Pliny the Elder,

Lucian, Rabelais, Vanini, Hobbes, Bayle, Diderot, La Mettrie, Hume, Gibbon, D'Holbach, Allen, Condorcet, Bentham, Comte, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Santayana, Russell

Unreliable religions: Xenophanes, Protagoras, Prodicus, Euhemerus, Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius, Sextus Empiricus, Machiavelli, Rabelais, Vanini, Hobbes, Spinoza, Meslier, Bayle, Hume, Voltaire, La Mettrie, Hume, Gibbon, D'Holbach, Diderot, Allen, Condorcet, Bentham, Comte, Feuerbach, Marx, Mill, Nietzsche, Santayana, Russell

Moral atheists: Democritus, Aristotle, Strato, Epicurus, Lucretius, Carneades, Vanini, Hobbes, Meslier, Bayle, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Vico, Wolff, Diderot, La Mettrie, Hume, D'Holbach, Condorcet, Bentham, Comte, Feuerbach, Marx, Mill, Haeckel, Nietzsche, Santayana, Sartre, Russell

Naturalize morality: Democritus, Aristotle, Strato, Epicurus, Lucretius, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Vico, Wolff, Diderot, Rousseau, La Mettrie, Hume, Voltaire, D'Holbach, Condorcet, Bentham, Comte, Marx, Mill, Spencer, Büchner, Haeckel, Nietzsche, Durkheim, Santayana, Dewey, Russell

Validate morality: Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius, Hobbes, Spinoza, Hutcheson, Wolff, Diderot, Hume, La Mettrie, D'Holbach, Wollstonecraft, Condorcet, Bentham, Comte, Marx, Mill, Nietzsche, Santayana, Dewey, Sartre, Russell

The moral atheologians who utilize all five strategies are Aristotle, Lucretius, Hobbes, La Mettrie, Hume, D'Holbach, Condorcet, Bentham, Comte, Marx, Nietzsche, Santayana, and Russell. Of these great atheologians, the first three (Aristotle, Lucretius, Hobbes) retained a place for a supreme being or natural gods but denied that the divine oversees morality. Three others (Hobbes, Comte, Santayana) held that the populace can remain benignly religious for moral and civic ends even if no gods are real. The strictest moral atheologians are therefore La Mettrie, Hume, D'Holbach, Condorcet, Bentham, Marx, Nietzsche, and Russell.

Moral Knowledge Arguments

The rest of this chapter sketches primary arguments in the debates between Moral atheology and moral theology. The first is the moral knowledge argument for god, which covers a family of related arguments centering on the need for god to ensure that there is moral knowledge.

Moral atheology relies on the availability of knowledge about objective morality, possessed by nontheists as well as theists. If theology denies

nontheists have any moral knowledge, moral knowledge would have to be linked with the "correct" religion and the "right" deity, thus begging the question of god's reality. We shall proceed on the fair basis that theists and nontheists alike can possess some objective moral knowledge. (Though they would not agree on all moral matters.) Granting this, moral theology argues that unless a god exists, it is impossible that any moral judgment can be objectively known. If no moral judgments are objectively correct, then moral knowledge is impossible, since (reasonably enough) moral opinion or whimsy should not count as knowledge. That is why the morality argument is sometimes formulated like this: Unless god exists, no one's moral judgments are genuinely known, but some moral judgments are known, so therefore god exists.

Moral atheology initially applies the rules of reason from the chapter on Rationalist atheology. For brevity here, let "morality" be shorthand for "objective moral knowledge" possessed by humanity. We shall start with simpler versions of the moral argument for god. Consider this argument: "If god exists, then morality is possible, and morality is possible, therefore god exists." This argument commits the logical fallacy of affirming the consequent (violating Rule 5 against absent justification) because there may be alternative explanations for morality besides god, so god is not necessarily relevant. That needed relevance can be added: "If god exists then god would ensure that morality is real, and morality is real, so therefore god exists." Perhaps god takes an interest in morality, but this argument remains fallacious, since it omits a proven connection between a god and morality (violating Rule 5 again). To relate to the first premise, the second premise would have to say something like "god would ensure that morality is real," and atheism need not grant that without additional argument, so this argument remains in violation of fallaciously affirming the consequent.

Theology sidesteps that fallacy by depicting god as exactly the sort of fine character who would prioritize the morality of humanity, but those depictions cannot improve the argument. What a god would do, if it was real, cannot reform the argument into a sound argument that proves anything. Typical versions of the moral knowledge argument, such as "God would communicate morality to us, so that's how we know it" or "God loves us so much that God would make some moral knowledge innate, so that's how we know it," are not reasonable because they still violate Rule 5. An argument only based on a presumed consistency between god and morality is insufficient.

David Baggett and Jerry Walls explore the capacity of an abductive argument to justify a real god's connection to morality in *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (2016). They argue that Christian theology's version of theism yields the best explanation for morality. They accordingly criticize naturalistic theories of morality for failing to explain essential features to morality, features that may be better explained by

Christian theism. The logical mountain to climb for any argument to the best explanation is the wide gap between "better than other explanations we have already thought of" and "better than all other possible explanations." Logically, one may reasonably refrain from agreeing with all available accounts if each one is inadequate—and that skeptical conclusion satisfies Moral atheology's goal. In order to close that gap and render a decisive conclusion, possible rival explanations have to be lumped together and contrasted with one's own preferred account. Baggett and Walls do precisely that: all naturalist ethics, they judge, must fall short. That is why this sort of abductive argument is actually less inductive in method (look at so many ways that god coheres better with morality) and more deductive in intent: only a supernatural god permits the existence of genuine morality. Akin to transcendental arguments, the central argument for reaching the theistic conclusion is actually this: "Morality exists only if god exists, and morality exists, so god exists." To justify that first premise, outstanding reasons must be provided by the theologian to account for morality's necessary dependence on god alone. The theological argument now shifts to proving that necessary dependence, and Moral atheology applies its strategies to defend nontheist ethics and doubt morality's dependency on god. Moral atheology never assumes that one or another naturalistic theory of morality is already established, but it does explain why the position that humanity has a natural capacity for morality is more plausible than the theological position that morality is explained through its dependency on a god. Previous sections explored Moral atheology's stands on humanity's morality, and the rest of this chapter argues that morality's dependence on god or god-belief is unreasonable.

Theological views on divine dependency violate several rules. God's perfections are beyond human comprehension, so it is mysterious how such perfection would be responsible for moral truths, violating Rule 1. Indeed, if god is beyond all human judgment, including moral judgment, then god may transcend our morality so thoroughly that what is moral for us may not be moral for god, but that requires us to 'know' contradictions (something can be both moral and immoral), violating Rule 2 against accepting contradiction. To avoid any gap between human morality and divine morality, it may be asserted that god is essentially connected to morality (just one morality) in some way. An argument that "God is essentially moral, and morality exists, so therefore god exists" simply begs the question by assuming the existence of god, violating Rule 3 against repetition. Likewise, any argument starting from "God is the ultimate Good," "God exemplifies morality," "God knows morality," "God established morality," "God's commands make morality," "God's motivations ground morality," and so on, all commit rule violations. Saying only that "God is moral" without further details about god or morality leaves them both a mystery, violating Rule 1 again, since the point of the morality argument is to connect them in some knowable way. If the information about a god provided by a religion

(e.g., from direct or scriptural revelation) includes immoral creeds and deeds, yet that religion insists that only this god guarantees what morality is, then contradictions arise and Rule 2 is violated again. Asserting that we can detect a ground for morality in something carefully selected about god, such as god's good conduct, good plans, good desires, or good motivations, requires that we first identify what is good, then impute it to god, and then circularly infer (violating Rule 3) that because god displays such goodness then that explains the moral good.

Asserting that god's existence is sufficient to create morality's truth violates Rule 4 against mysterious causes, since any causal relationship between god and morality is left entirely mysterious. Asserting that god must the unique ground of morality because this god is the most perfect being we can conceive violates Rule 5, since a mere ability to conceive what we suppose is perfect is no explanation for why we should base morality on that imagined thing, especially since the ontological argument for god is a failure. Asserting that only a god could ensure that some genuinely true morality is known by some sentient being violates Rule 6 against arbitrary justification, since this reason why we must appeal to a god can equally support rival explanations, such as the obvious explanation that us human beings can already know some true morality (which has to be premised anyways to get the morality argument started). Finally, asserting that a known morality requires not just a knower but also some higher-level knower for confirming that knowledge is an assertion that suggests a need for a god to supervise who knows morality. But this application of a "confirmation principle" to god arouses the meta-level question about what higher-level being, higher than god, confirms that god really knows morality—and the theologian has no choice now but to simply claim that god is the ultimate being exempt from the confirmation principle, but that violates Rule 7 about unjustified exemptions.[33]

We can move on to another major version of the moral knowledge, which emphasizes the relation between knowledge and truth. That relation can initially be expressed in this way: "Knowledge is about truths, and a complete account of any item of knowledge explains why there is that truth." Applied to moral knowledge, the theologian can then ask whether theism or non-theism has a more straightforward explanation why moral truths are true. If atheists lack a good explanation, then that inability to account for their moral knowledge might prevent them from reasonably defending that knowledge as the truth. Theism's account seems straightforward by comparison: god's existence is responsible for moral truths. For theology, religion-based moral knowledge is more secure than any putative moral knowledge from nontheists, so someone who wants their moral knowledge to sound reasonable and be taken seriously should be a theist. Let this theological strategy be labeled as a moral truth argument for god.

This moral truth argument partially retracts the initial presumption that nonbelievers can have moral knowledge no less than god-believers. If moral

knowledge must be accompanied by knowledge of what makes a moral truth true, and atheists may lack that additional knowledge, then atheists may lack convincing moral knowledge due to insufficient justification. Moral atheology is entitled to raise a protest here, objecting again that theology cannot withdraw moral knowledge from all nontheists without begging the question of god's existence. Nevertheless, Moral atheology should accept this challenge of moral truth. Moral atheology does presume the availability of objective moral knowledge to humanity. Moral atheology is not burdened with the task of philosophically justifying the existence of objective moral truth, since it only has to maneuver on the same neutral ground as moral theology for purposes of comparison there. Moral atheology does not have to ally with any ethical theorizing about the respective merits of moral realism, ethical realism, or ethical naturalism.[34] Nevertheless, acknowledging objective moral knowledge does implicate Moral atheology with a cognitivist position on moral knowledge and moral truths, which implies factors to moral realism. Without making more philosophical commitments than necessary, both Moral atheology and moral theology can turn to common sense criteria.[35] Basic criteria for moral truth most useful for moral theology are (a) knower-independence and (b) invariance. Even if objective knowledge can partially relate to the knower, the truth known cannot depend on each knower. If a truth depends on its knower, it is subjective rather than entirely objective. The independence of truth is connected with another sign of truth: its invariability across knowers. A truth cannot be true for one knower but simultaneously false for another knower. These commonsensical realist ideas about objectivity and truth can be acknowledged as sensible enough by Moral atheology, and they are essential to moral theology's explication of its moral truth argument for god.

Simplistic appeals to god to ensure moral truths satisfy the faithful. "Moral truth is guaranteed by divine authority, overriding any human opinion or consensus, so god's supreme authority guarantees all moral knowledge and moral truth." God should be in the best position to know morality, right? "Moral truth is knowable by being in the best position to know, and god is in the perfect position to know all truths, so therefore the existence of objective moral truths is guaranteed." Such arguments beg the question of god's existence, but more complex versions suffer from deep problems as well.

Moral theology requires that morality is essentially dependent on a supernatural being, as already noted. That dependency relationship is easily associated with moral realism for the theist, a moral realism that is supposedly problematic for any naturalistic moral theory. Paul Copan states this directly: "The truth of moral realism is far from clear, given naturalism. Theists, on the other hand, face no such difficulty. Theists maintain that moral realism and God's existence are ontologically connected."[36] Such a direct dependency between god and moral truth provides the opening for Moral atheology's critique of the moral truth argument that god is the best

explanation for moral truths. That dependency conflicts with the knowledge-independence requirement for moral truth. If god knows moral truths only because god understands itself, then that moral knowledge is subjective, not objective. The way that god's moral knowledge would appear objective for humanity (for morality is independent of all of us) is irrelevant. If the King of France once said, "My supreme majesty makes me quite sure that torturing Protestants in my Catholic kingdom is right," the King's loyal subjects may take that judgment for an objective truth, but the King's subjectivity prevents that judgment from being about an objective truth. A god's subjective moral judgment can appear objective for the devout, but there is no objective moral truth here. God cannot be used to explain a single moral truth if that truth cannot be independent from god. The moral truth argument for god fails on the moral realism scenario because there is no objective moral truth to explain.

The theological response to this objection would point out that humanity's knowledge of morality was the original matter to be explained. Moral objectivity for humanity is the neutral ground for both Moral atheology and moral theology. Moral atheology can accept that point, while maintaining that morality's essential dependency on god prevents the moral truth argument from showing that god is real. We shall keep in mind, therefore, that humanly knowable moral judgments are at stake. Such judgments take typical forms, such as "I ought to do act A in this situation," "It is always wrong for a person to let event E happen," "Helping others is a good thing to do," or "Never telling a lie is the right rule to follow," and so forth. Without enumerating or categorizing the grammatical forms of such judgments, a general feature to moral judgments is the way that they all deliver a normative evaluation along with whatever else they are saying.

In Hume's terminology, ordinary moral judgments involve the idea of an 'Ought' in addition to factual descriptions about what 'Is'. Many philosophers, following Hume's lead, have agreed with what is usually labeled as the "Is-Ought Fallacy": any argument having premises which are consistent with each other yet state only matters of conceptual truth or matters of fact, and has a conclusion making a substantive normative judgment (including all moral judgments), must be a fallacious argument. Put another way, it is impossible to logically derive any 'ought' judgment by itself (not contained within a larger proposition as a subordinate clause) from any number of 'is' propositions. This "Is-Ought Fallacy" does not forbid factual premises from supporting factual conclusions about morality as it is practiced, or what people happen to think or say about morality, or what they do with morality—it only forbids deducing concrete moral judgments aiming at objectivity from any number of statements about what happens to be the case. Forbidding the "Is-Ought" fallacy is a specific instance of a violation of Rule 5, since the factual premises are not sufficiently relevant to determining the truth of a concrete moral judgment, nor can they fully justify it.[37]

When the theologian takes on the task of showing that a moral truth automatically follows from some fact or facts about god, it can superficially appear that no risk of committing an "Is-Ought" fallacy is possible. The theologian is arguing that moral truths necessarily follow from god's existence and nature, rather than arguing that concrete moral judgments directly follow from god. Moral atheology now points out that many people do try, and often succeed, in making objective moral judgments without consulting a theistic deity or thinking about any god's existence at all. The morality argument for god has to use god to also explain how people successfully make objective moral judgments in real-world situations. The overall argument involving moral truth takes this form:

1. Only if god exists, would there be objective moral knowledge held by people.
2. There is objective moral knowledge held by people.

Therefore, god exists.

The key sub-argument for premise 1 proceeds as follows:

i. Only if god exists, would moral truths be real.
ii. Only if moral truths are real, would there be objectivity for moral knowledge.

So,

1. Only if god exists, would there be objective moral knowledge held by people.

There are two logical gaps in this sub-argument. The first logical gap involves the way that the second premise mentions "objectivity for moral knowledge" in the abstract, while the conclusion is about actual moral knowledge possessed by real people. Even if a god makes moral truths true, that is insufficient for inferring that any actual people know any of those truths too.

The second logical gap is a violation of the "Is-Ought" rule, since the conclusion only appears to be a factual statement, but in fact it has an 'ought' character. Recall from the start of this section how the theologian must only deal with actual instances of objective moral judgments worthy to be called knowledge. The proposition "there is objective moral knowledge held by people" means that there are people who objectively know some moral oughts. To claim that there are people objectively knowing some moral oughts is to claim that those moral oughts are valid, and hence the person making that claim is endorsing those moral oughts as well. That is why the theologian applying the moral argument for god is careful from the outset

to point to cases of shared moral knowledge with nontheists, so that the disagreement is focused on god's existence, and not over who has moral knowledge. This means that the theologian must admit that the conclusion of this sub-argument is essentially an "ought" proposition, not simply a factual proposition about what "is." No facts about god's essential nature, facts about god's deeds, or facts about anything god creates, are sufficient for inferring a single moral ought. Not even a fact, if it is the case, that god made people to know morality can be used to infer that objective moral knowledge is actually possessed by any of us.

Moral atheology concludes that arguments from moral knowledge and moral truth are so flawed that they fail to show how god's existence is explanatory. This verdict is not about naturalistic views of morality, or whether any of them are better explanations than the theistic account. Theism does not automatically become more explanatory just because naturalism seems inadequate. The burden rests solely on moral theology to show that god has any explanatory relevance to humanity's morality. Moral atheology concludes that god is not morally relevant, so it is reasonable to conclude that no god is needed for morality.

How could a hypothetical deity be more important for knowing moral judgments than the real-world situations calling for our moral judgments? Compare these two situations:

> Situation A. An innocent child is needlessly suffering.
> Situation B. An innocent child is needlessly suffering, and a god exists.

Which situation has sufficient external matters for making it objectively true that this child's pointless suffering should be relieved by available assistance? Put another way, having granted that moral knowledge is possible, the question comes to this. All internal factors being equal (e.g., a nontheist is not psychologically or morally deficient compared to a theist), is the nontheist unable to know what is truly morally right in Situation A, while the theist is able to truly know what is morally right in Situation B?

According to moral theology's stand on moral realism, only the second situation provides for objective moral truth: only if a god exists would there be a moral truth of the matter and someone could know how it is morally true this child's suffering should be relieved. For this moral theology, if a nontheist happens to think that the child should be assisted, then that judgment is moral, but the nontheist cannot know that it is objectively true, and could not justify to anyone else why the child truly deserves assistance. The moral theologian can therefore insinuate that the nontheist is some sort of moral relativist or moral subjectivist: the child might be helped by those who feel like intervening, but the nontheist must admit that no one is objectively wrong for not thinking that this is a situation calling for intervention. Could it be correct that no one, believer or nonbeliever, really knows what is right unless god is added to each moral

situation? The nontheist finds that answer monstrous and unethical. The child's situation can allow anyone, believer or nonbeliever, to think that assistance is morally right. Theists also thinking about their god are having one thought too many.

Piety or Morality

Moral theology expects that god is somehow responsible for the difference between right and wrong, and good and evil. This section pursues the question whether devotion to a theistic god is compatible with sound moral judgment about objective good and evil. Moral atheology has the right to appeal to objective moral knowledge available to all peoples (even if many individuals are violators) regarding the evaluation of good and evil. Not only does that moral knowledge proscribe the commission of evil, evil can be defined in a secular manner as follows: something is evil if it violates the good and no proportionate good could possibly come from it or excuse it. On that secular definition, secular people can discern evil. Can theology guarantee that righteous knowledge of good and evil is possible on religious terms?

Many religious people suppose that they are moral, and judge moral matters rightly because they follow a moral deity. However, in order to honestly answer the question of "Why am I moral," a theist is forced into an unavoidable trilemma of either committing a blasphemy, an atrocity, or a sin. Trying to avoid that trilemma only drags moral theology into even deeper dilemmas.

"My god is always perfectly moral," religious believers instinctively say. But when they change their mind about some moral issue, and promptly claim that god had always agreed with their new viewpoint, they are simply expecting god to follow their moral decisions. That expectation amounts to a blasphemous presumption that a human being can dictate to god what morality must be. To avoid presumptuous blasphemy, believers could instead confess that they would obey a surprising command from god, even if it initially struck them as immoral. Protestant theologian William Lane Craig urges this option on Christians. His article on his Reasonable Faith website about questioning the Bible's morality can find no fault with Yahweh's command to the Israelites to occupy Canaanite lands and genocidally eliminate the inhabitants by any means necessary, including the murder of men, women, and children (Deuteronomy chap. 7). Craig asserts that Biblical inerrancy must not be surrendered, so a Christian must accept that Yahweh really did issue this command. What then must we think about Yahweh's morality? Craig says,

> God has the right to take the lives of the Canaanites when He sees fit. How long they live and when they die is up to Him. So the problem is not that God ended the Canaanites' lives. The problem is that He

> commanded the Israeli soldiers to end them. Is not that like commanding someone to commit murder? No, it's not. Rather, since our moral duties are determined by God's commands, it is commanding someone to do something which, in the absence of a divine command, *would have been* murder.[38]

Craig's position is that Christians never have to worry about their God issuing an immoral command, since this God's commands are necessarily moral. The Christian capacity for moral judgment amounts to unquestioningly obeying everything their god commands. A theist accepting this account of divine authority is, potentially, capable of any horrible atrocity.

Is there a way for the theist to avoid either blasphemies or atrocities? There is the third option: disobedience. A believer could vow to disobey a valid yet immoral command from god, and sinfully refuse to follow god. Ultimately, a religious person has only three options: set yourself up as an equal judge of morality alongside god, be prepared to commit a moral atrocity upon god's command, or be steadfast enough to defy an immoral decree from god.

Atheists are not impressed by a religion permitting god to authorize or encourage evil. Moral atheology generalizes this problem to criticize any religion which requires god to not just allow evil to happen, but also requires god to be ultimately responsible for evil. The "problem of evil" raised by Moral atheology questions why god would allow evils to happen within creation. Theodicies can imaginatively design divine scenarios that appear to provide god with good excuses, or at least take away all human ability to judge god.[39] The issue cannot be proven one way or the other, since the amount of available evidence is always finite. However, the problem of evil is ultimately about questioning whether god is evil. Theodicies attempting to explain away or justify evils by appealing to god's worthy plans only manage to indict those plans for perpetrating evil, and end up condemning god as the less-than-worthy author of those dubious plans.[40]

Moral atheology next raises to a related problem. The problem of evil for god is deeply connected to the problem of morality for the faithful. As far as atheology is concerned, the ways of imaginary gods in their heavens are not hardly as disturbing as the behavior of real people here on earth. Much moral criticism of religion comes from religious people themselves. Religious people notice when people of their own religion, or of other religions, commit immoral deeds in the name of religion. Religious people also tend to regard their own religion as quite moral, and defend their personal conduct as religiously ethical. Moral atheology must therefore question whether religiosity is compatible with human morality.

To further expose the incompatibility between pious religiosity and morality, let's turn to Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro*, where Socrates poses the Euthyphro Dilemma by asking "whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods." Socrates goes

on to wonder whether piety could ever be discerned by making it dependent on the gods.[41] Is something is morally right because god makes it so, or god makes it right because it is moral? If something is right because a god makes it so, then god could possibly change it (for all we know), and then the right could instead be the wrong. On the other hand, if a god makes something right because that is moral, then morality is independent of god (so perhaps people do not need any god to know morality). To avoid the second horn of the dilemma, the religious theory of morality must run into the first horn, and admit that morality could have been different, and therefore this theory cannot really guarantee the stability of morality.

Christian theologians do try to avoid the Euthyphro Dilemma. The typical tactic declares that god cannot change morality, because morality is so dependent on god's unchanging reality that god would never make right and wrong, or good and evil, other than what it is. Details of the resulting theological difficulties are discussed in the previous section, which shows why morality cannot be sufficient evidence for god. What humanity knows about morality, or at least what humanity thinks it knows about morality, cannot be applied to pass any judgment on god's morality, if god has any. What god makes good and evil ends up beyond all human evaluation or criticism. The good is what god has willed by god's own nature, according to theism, yet who can truly know god's nature or will? Theology is headed towards a second looming dilemma. We may label it as the Spinoza Dilemma, because Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) denounces the tendency of a theology crediting god and creation with supreme goodness to render humanity ignorant of this true goodness when natural matters seem unmistakably evil.[42]

This Spinoza Dilemma emerges when theology takes a rigid view of divine goodness. If god could not make good and evil other than what it is, then good and evil itself cannot change. Whatever is good is really and truly good regardless of human recognition of its goodness, and likewise whatever is evil is really evil no matter how humanity may perceive it. This rigid view of goodness applies not only to god (who is thoroughly and truly good, for theology), but also to anything god is responsible for, such as the created world. Whatever is truly good or truly evil in the world is a fixed matter, and not something upon which there could be multiple valid perspectives. What then happens to our human judgments of good and evil? As the previous section described, in order to avoid having to say that divine evils are truly from god, theology has to reduce our human judgment about good and evil to just a perspective, and not a valid perspective, but only a fallible and often mistaken perspective. The Spinoza Dilemma is a theological forced choice between whether (a) humanity has a valid perspective on good and evil, allowing us to judge god's goodness, or (b) humanity only has a fallible perspective on good and evil, so we cannot judge god's goodness. This is an easy dilemma for a stubborn theology. In order to prevent humanity from validly accusing god of real evils, theology must select option (b), declaring that human judgment of good and evil is fallible. Even the most religiously

pious people are included: no human being can be assured of possessing infallible judgment about good and evil.

If human judgments about good and evil are so fallible, atheology next wonders if anyone could ever acquire sound moral judgment from religious piety. A third dilemma for theology can now be raised, a dilemma captured well by Fyodor Dostoevsky. His novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) depicts the brothers debating god's existence and whether god's creation could really be as morally perfect as the faithful believe. Some of those debates (especially in Book Five) bring up the modern problem of evil: How could a perfect, all-good god permit evil in the world?[43] A theological answer, pronounced by the more pious brother, is that every apparent evil must actually be good from god's standpoint, but we are too ignorant to understand how. The skeptical brother is not impressed by this neat answer. This theological appeal to human ignorance has curious consequences, which Dostoevsky noticed. This confession of ignorance drives Christianity straight into Dostoevsky's question: Why should I have to surrender my understanding of good and evil to be religious? Was not religion supposed to guarantee that the faithful can know good from evil?

Theology promises that one can know right from wrong through religious piety. When theology adds that god's creation is morally perfect yet no one can know how, troubles mount. The more we are religiously pious, the more we should know good from evil—yet the more pious we are, we must come to accept apparent evil as somehow (mysteriously) good, so we no longer know the difference between good and evil. On the first horn of the Dostoevsky Dilemma, one can know that there are real evils in creation by observing them, and therefore god is responsible for creating evils, so one cannot trust god's moral judgment. On the other horn of this dilemma, one can know that everything in creation is perfectly good, and one cannot think that there are any real evils in creation despite observing them, so one cannot trust one's own moral judgment. Pick the first horn of Dostoevsky's Dilemma: god cannot be trusted on good and evil, so why should one be religiously pious? Or, pick the second horn of his dilemma: you cannot be trusted on good and evil, so why should one be religiously pious? Either way, the alleged connection between religious piety and sound morality is severed. On those two theological premises, religious piety cannot ensure that religious people are reliable moral.

The conjoined dilemmas of Socrates, Spinoza, and Dostoevsky drive religious ethics into an inescapable trap. Any religion promising knowledge of morality through religious piety towards god is undermined by its own theology trying to rescue religious ethics, as it is forced to admit that humans are fallible and ignorant about god's morality. Either god can be divinely moral or people can be religiously moral, but theology cannot ensure that both affairs can be known together by humanity. (It remains open for theology to admit that god's creation is flawed by evil or people can be moral without god, but those options abandon moral arguments for god.) Moral

theology leaves humanity in a dubious condition about the accuracy of moral judgment, and no amount of piety can improve that condition. Fortunately, humanity does have moral knowledge, as moral theology and Moral atheology both agree. If an ethically-minded Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist can know right from wrong regardless of their piety, then any ethically-minded atheist can know right from wrong as well.

Moral Motivation Arguments

A moral motivation argument tries to show that moral conduct depends on a personal conviction that morality is divinely supported. Even if knowledge of god's relationship to morality remains elusive, and even if knowledge of morality need not depend on piety, behaving morally should be dutifully yet voluntarily performed. Why would people try to be moral on earth, if they were not motivated by heaven? According to moral theology, unbelievers lack the courage of their convictions and more frequently fail to be moral, and they are less resistant to maleficent worldly powers.

In 2004 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) depicted the contemporary Western situation in this manner:

> Faith in God, the idea of God, can be manipulated, and then it becomes destructive: this is the risk that religion runs. But reason that cuts itself off from God completely and tries to confine him to the purely subjective realm loses its bearings and thus opens the door to the forces of destruction. Whereas the Enlightenment was searching for moral foundations that would be valid "etsi Deus non daretur" [even if God did not exist], we must invite our agnostic friends to be receptive to a morality "si Deus daretur" [as if God did exist].[44]

Ratzinger placed greater faith in religious powers rather than secular powers. For a prince of the Catholic Church, that loyalty is predictable, but not so commendable. The all-consuming devotion to righteous certainties has long tormented and destabilized the West. All the same, religion retains the right to ask secularism this question: Who are the more dangerous overlords, the religious Priests or the secular Princes? Even democracy can devolve into forms of totalitarianism or tyranny if good people cannot summon the will to resist. The next chapter recounts that contest between civil theology and Civil atheology. The challenge for Moral atheology is to respond to theism's charge that nonreligious people could not fully answer to morality even if they know what it demands, while people of faith can be more reliably moral.

Catholic theology developed moral motivation arguments in medieval times, but we shall continue the argument in modernity with Protestant Immanuel Kant. His philosophy of religion argued that people trying to be moral must be faithful theists. His works of critical philosophy denied that knowledge of god is possible, but his *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen*

der bloßen Vernunft (Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason, 1793) faulted the atheist for unreasonably refusing to believe in god. He describes the moral theist as someone whose belief in god is tied to understanding the necessity of moral law. For Kant, only a moral theist can reliably follow moral duty, so an atheist fails to be moral for the right reason and is less likely to be a moral person in general. The only way for a person to be convinced that the moral law (and the categorical imperative on which the moral law rests) is necessary, Kant claims, is to be convinced that a righteous and just deity ultimately guarantees morality's necessarily obligatory status. Reasonable people, the 'moral theists', would ensure that they have faith in this deity, so that morality's necessity is fully acknowledged. This moral theist, according to Kant's *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*,

> needs no speculative proofs of the existence of God; he is convinced of it with certainty, because otherwise he would have to reject the necessary laws of morality which are grounded in the nature of his being. Thus he derives theology from morality, yet not from speculative but from practical evidence; i.e. not though knowledge but from faith.[45]

Moral atheology must handle this kind of argument from moral conviction with great care, so that the nature of this argument is understood. For example, the following argument is not Kantian:

1. The moral law is necessary.
2. Only if god exists to establish the moral law, could the moral law be necessary.

Therefore, god exists.

Kant would not appeal to an ontologically existing being to explain something that is already necessary. Kant's god is not responsible for commanding morality, and Kant's god is not an ontological god. This condensed argument better captures the direction of Kant's religious project:

1. Through the exercise of one's reason, a person can realize the necessity of the moral law. (Kant's basis to the categorical imperative)
2. Acting reasonably in accordance with one's duties in line with the moral law requires a person to commit to the practical reasonableness of fulfilling the moral law. (Kant's premise about practical psychology)
3. It is unreasonable for a person to commit to the practical reasonableness of fulfilling the moral law unless that person feels guaranteed that the moral law is necessarily fulfilled. (from 1 and 2)
4. The only way for a person to realize that the moral law is necessarily fulfilled is to believe in a righteous and just god who would guarantee the fulfillment of the moral law. (Kant's practical hypothesis of god)

5. It is reasonable for a person to faithfully believe in this god in order to commit to reasonably fulfilling the moral law. (from 3 and 4)
6. Only the person who faithfully believes in this righteous and just god is someone who can practically fulfill the moral law. (from 4 and 5)

Therefore, practical reason demands faithful belief in the righteous and just god.

Kant emphasizes how our conception of this god is not our arbitrary notion, nor is it compelled by pure reasoning. We construct the conception of this god by choosing only those divine features required for the human commitment to the moral law, so we understand the entire conception of this deity. Any additional characters assigned to this god would come from imposing wish-fulfillment or surpassing cognition's limits. Despite all the mysteries promulgated by religion, any morally reasonable person can reflectively figure out the required divine features, so Kant expects morality's convergence on a singular deity:

> This idea of a moral ruler of the world is a task for our practical reason. Our concern is not so much to know what he is in himself (his nature) but what he is for us as moral beings; even though for the sake of this relation we must think the divine nature by assuming it to have the full perfection required for the execution of his will (e.g. as the will of an immutable, omniscient, all-powerful, etc. being). And apart from this relation we can cognize nothing about him. Now, in accordance with this need of practical reason, the universal true religious faith is faith in God (1) as the almighty creator of heaven and earth, i.e. morally as holy lawgiver; (2) as the preserver of the human race, as its benevolent ruler and moral guardian; (3) as the administrator of his own holy laws, i.e. as just judge.[46]

As a corollary, Kant classifies the unbeliever as someone who unreasonably refuses to commit to this deity. By denying god in her heart, the atheist effectively denies the reason in her nature, which would be unreasonable for anyone. The atheist lacks sufficient motivation to obey the moral law, and therefore abjures the Kingdom of Ends and participates in moral evil. Furthermore, the atheist must live in moral despair, since Kant thinks that an unbeliever's moral deeds must seem pointless, and the annihilation of all goodness would be the fate for a cosmos without god.[47]

Moral atheology does not contest the first Kantian proposition, for it has no rival ethical theorizing of its own. Returning to the above argument for practical faith, the controversy begins at premise 2. Premise 2 is allowable, so long as one's own action is taken to be the needed fulfillment of the moral law from situation to situation (a version of 'ought' implies 'can', perhaps). However, premise 2 is ambiguous. It leads on to premise 3 only if the moral law's fulfillment is presumed to be necessary no matter what contribution to morality a

person's singular act actually makes. That interpretation can be contested, and it should be questioned, since premise 3's sweeping scope about the ultimate fulfillment of morality amounts to proposing an impossibly high standard of moral perfection: nothing is moral enough unless everything is morally perfect. This Kantian moral perfectionism is reflected in those moral perfections of god which we can see (since we selected those divine features), and our own efforts to be moral reflect poorly on us by comparison. Moral atheology has no sympathy for Kant's Christian pietism behind that moral perfectionism, but it does have great sympathy for ordinary people trying to live the morally good life. This argument cannot reach its intended conclusion.

The inference to reach premise 4, and the plausibility of premise 4, can both be rejected. First, the person acting rightly without hope that morality will universally prevail is still a person of good will, not less commendable than someone doing the right action with certainty that morality's victory is inevitable. Second, because an act is moral from conformity with the moral law and not from the actor's other beliefs, all moral deeds by a nontheist are perfectly moral—no other state of affairs can detract from that moral status, regardless of whether a god is involved with the moral world. Third, our confidence as moral agents that our moral deeds are contributing in a real way to the destiny of the moral world is eroded by simultaneously expecting a god to pre-arrange the morally perfect destiny of creation. Fourth, although aids to moral motivation must not be overlooked by any ethical theory, unearthly postulates must be weighed against sensible earthly alternatives. Devotion to ethical communities and sacrifice for a more ethical human future are ethical projects yielding genuine moral meaning to one's life, without causing any diminution to moral agency or extinguishing the light of hope.[48]

A Kantian theist would point out that two further responsibilities placed upon god have not yet been taken into account: god as the metaphysical basis for the *summum bonum*, and god as the punishing judge delivering cosmic justice. In regard to the ultimate good, moral atheology would again ask whether it coincides with the fulfillment of the moral law, or not—if so, then god need do nothing and the above analysis stands; and if not, then we are left in doubt whether god's supreme plans are truly moral, and the difference between good and evil is left in obscurity. As for the theological interest in divine retribution, the necessity of a god to sternly judge humanity's moral performance can be doubted.

Theologies of many religions sternly warn about the dire consequences of moral failure. A generalized argument for god from divine justice can take this form:

1. People by their nature are obligated to fulfill certain supreme moral obligations.
2. The divine realm rightfully expects each person to fulfill these supreme moral obligations.

3. People by their nature lack the capacity to satisfy these supreme moral obligations.
4. To avoid the inevitable righteous judgment of moral failure, people must submit to whatever the divine requires.
5. In order to submit to what the divine requires, people must believe in the divine.

Therefore, people must believe in the divine.

The basic idea to this argument is that each person is supposed to be like an angel, yet every one of us is little better than a devil. We should feel terribly guilty, and the divine cannot disagree. For religions with a supreme god serving as your stern judge, you really do not want to disappoint this god, needless to say, or end up finding out the terrible fate of the guilty.

Moral atheology points out severe injustices built into this perspective on divine justice. If premises 2 and 3 are accurate, then the divine effectively holds people to high moral standards which they cannot naturally fulfill (with much frequency, at least). The principle of "ought implies can" has been inverted to become "cannot implies ought." Why would a deity deliver retribution upon people doing the very best that they naturally can, even as they faithfully try? (Myths about guilty ancestors dooming us all to sin need not make sense to believers.) As for unbelievers, some who fulfill moral expectations as well as any believer, they must be severely punished just for their lack of faith. There is no righteous justice to a system in which some of the most moral people are doomed to punishment. On behalf of both believers and nonbelievers, premise 4 must also be rejected as unjust, and the argument from divine justice collapses.

Moral motivation arguments for god seek unnatural motivations to impel moral conformity from people naturally unwilling to be moral. Moral atheology concludes that nothing supernatural can do that job without resorting to immoral means or risking immoral ends. Non-theistic worldviews, such as humanism, judge that it is morally prudent to encourage duty for duty's sake in a world that needs all the morality it can get, here and now.

Pascal's Wager

Pascal's wager challenges nonreligious people to rely on their heads, if they will not listen to their hearts. Is not it smarter to take the chance that god does exist, rather than living a life in denial of that possibility? His wager is initially proposed as a probabilistic calculation about weighing expected outcomes. That epistemic stage-setting is only a preamble for the dramatic climax to his core argument of largely moral dimensions. For Pascal, a reasonable conversion into a religion ultimately rests on personal character and virtuous choice. His wager is less epistemic and more moralistic, so it is analyzable by Moral atheology.

Skeptical humility is a virtue often preached by atheists, but theists can also appeal to that virtue, exemplified by mathematician and scientist Blaise Pascal (1623–62). His notable contribution to Christian philosophy is his famous "wager" that the religious life is the better "bet" than the nonreligious life. "Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is."[49]

Wagers make little sense if they are about either an extreme improbability or a near-certainty. Pascal's wager starts from robust skepticism: no one is entitled to judge any particular probability for god's existence due to lack of information. He does not assume that his wagerers are figuring on a 50/50 chance, or any specific probability. He does presume that the confident atheist is a fool and a liar, claiming knowledge about god unattainable by mortals. The agnostic sanely realizes how deeply ignorant one must be about transcendent matters, and understands how Pascal's wager can be rationally considered. Decisions can be made, fortunately, under conditions where no degree of confidence either way is available. Such situations are quite real and encountered daily; the wavering unbeliever is already in a religious version of this situation. To dismiss the wager as foolishness is to stubbornly continue to prefer disbelief over belief, for Pascal.

Pascal then asks whether, all things considered, how it could be wiser to prefer disbelief.[50] Is it so wise to walk away from an easy opportunity to gain eternal bliss in heaven, when all one has to do is faithfully worship on earth? After all, what could be gained is infinite, and incomparable to the finite cost of living righteously. Atheists criticize Pascal's wager by wondering how he can prove that god might really exist, where he gets his confidence that Catholicism is the only religion to consider, or why god would let self-interested followers into heaven. Atheology instead focuses on the core problem: how could Pascal first justify a convincing agnosticism, and next turn around to justify a reasonable theism?

Pascal's wager is only initially forced upon people, who could otherwise rightly dismiss it as fanciful and irrelevant, when two preconditions are validly satisfied: (1) no one has good enough reasons to suspect either way that a god does or does not exist; and (2) everyone has good enough reason to suspect that one 'true' god(s) ensures an undesirable afterlife for unbelievers. (Pascal is contemptuous towards threats of hell, but he does depict non-salvation as a most unfortunate destiny). In the course of setting up his wager in front of the nonbeliever, Pascal states these presumptions, but more skepticism is needed. Pascal has to create the impression that (1) and (2) are compatible, but they only conflict. Premise (2) presumes significant information which (1) tries to rules out. Yet Pascal needs both. If we can reasonably judge that (2) is possibly accurate, then one must wager only on a god self-righteously jealous for exclusive piety. That means that (1) has been discarded, and the reasons for thinking that (2) is valid can do the needed work to arouse religiosity instead of a chancy wager. Alternatively,

if (1) is valid, than (2) cannot be valid. Instead of thinking that there is any chance of earning hell, nonbelievers can remain unmovable agnostics and stay immune from Pascal's judgment of foolishness.

When Pascal demands that the skeptic should admit up front how no one can know anything about an afterlife, the skeptic need only reply, "Indeed no one knows anything, so provide reasons for assigning a probability to your scenario, or else admit how you are more foolish than we are." When Pascal accuses the skeptic of wrongly guessing that a god may admit impious yet morally good people into heaven, the skeptic can just reply, "So explain to us your good reasons for knowing that much about god's righteous judgment." If Pascal cannot give good reasons up front, the wager is irrelevant and the skeptic is faultless for staying nonreligious. If Pascal can give good reasons, then the wager is not needed and ordinary religious apologetics is doing the actual argumentative work. Making the wager plausible only eliminates the need for the wager. It is unreasonable for Pascal to delay meeting his obligation to appeal to reasons until after he thinks that his wager is pulling agnostics off the fence towards religion.

Pascal becomes more unreasonable for his treatment of his kind of agnostics. Passages in his *Pensées* insinuate that an unbeliever cannot live an ethical and worthy life and unbelievers should feel insecure in their doubt, while other passages applaud the trustworthiness and veracity of Biblical claims about Jesus, revelations, prophecies, miracles, and the like. Ultimately, Pascal cannot have it both ways. He wants his Christian apologetics to sound plausible after agnostics agree to place their wager on god, yet Pascal must first convince firm atheists to become fence-sitting agnostics. Nothing Pascal says about the wager itself can convey the unbeliever any farther than dubious agnosticism. An unbeliever who is honestly impressed by how little can be grasped of the greatest mysteries will not promptly forget that humbling lesson just because Pascal pontificates at length about how the Bible is an accurate source of information about god and the afterlife.

Pascal's recourse to dogmatic apologetics notwithstanding, he certainly wants to ensure that no unbeliever would ever have the right to pass judgment against the believer's chosen faith. His strategy provides for a back-up plan. Against those who say "That wager is not for me," Pascal's strategy effectively replies, "You have chosen only for yourself, and you have no reasonable way to criticize those who wager on god." This is the heart of Pascal's individualistic and moralistic existentialism: people are entirely on their own, making their singular bet on their lives as they judge best, and no one can pass judgment upon another person's bet. Moral atheology can understand why religiosity can get connected with personal ethics, but it cannot agree that a real god has to be involved. Pascal's wager cannot be compelling for the confident atheist or the humble agnostic, who remain reasonable for ignoring religion's promises and threats. It is the faithful believer in god who remains unreasonable. Admitting how reasons cannot

decide one's choice of faith does not mean that you are virtuous for resigning your reason to a religion.

Notes

1 Notable books of Moral atheology in recent decades include Nielsen, *Ethics Without God* (1973); Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism* (1987); Nielsen, *God and the Grounding of Morality* (1991); Sharpe, *The Moral Case Against Religious Belief* (1997); Drange, *Nonbelief & Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God* (1998); Martin, *Atheism, Morality, and Meaning* (2002); Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument From Evil* (2006); Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007); and Aikin and Talisse, *Reasonable Atheism: A Moral Case for Respectful Disbelief* (2011). Terry Eagleton laments the moral insensitivities and ethical lapses of both Christianity and New Atheism in *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (2009).

2 This has long been a Christian view, for example, only mildly chastened by acquaintance with the other religions of the world. At the height of its influence in the late 1800s, Princeton Seminary and its leading theologian, A. A. Hodge, upheld Christianity as the highest and truest form of both religion and morality. See Hodge, "Morality and Religion" (1883).

3 Notable historical figures are acknowledged in Larue, *Freethought Across the Centuries* (1996). Recognizable names within living memory are listed in Barker, *The Good Atheist: Living a Purpose-Filled Life Without God* (2011).

4 Zuckerman, ed., *Atheism and Secularity* (2010); de Waal, *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates* (2013).

5 Three recent works exemplify typical arguments for god based on morality produced by Protestant and Catholic authors. Evans defends revelation from God for moral commands in *God and Moral Obligation* (2013). Baggett and Walls defend reasoning from God to moral truth in *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (2011). Siniscalchi argues from moral realism to humanity's created nature in "Modified Divine Commands, Atheistic Moral Realism, and Thomistic Natural Law" (2015). On Judaism, see Mittleman, *A Short History of Jewish Ethics: Conduct and Character in the Context of Covenant* (2012). On Islam, see al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics: Divine Command Theory in Arabo-Islamic Thought* (2010).

6 See *Xenophanes of Colophon: Fragments: A Text and Translation With Commentary* (1992), and Warren, "Gods and Men in Xenophanes" (2013).

7 See the commentary by Mayhew accompanying his translation of Plato, *Laws 10* (2008).

8 Consult Menn, "Aristotle's Theology" (2012); Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics* (2000); and Miller, ed., *The Reception of Aristotle's Ethics* (2012).

9 See Inwood, *Ethics After Aristotle* (2014); O'Keefe, *Epicureanism* (2014); and Brennan, *The Stoic Life, Emotions, Duties and Fate* (2005).

10 See Colman, *Lucretius as Theorist of Political Life* (2012).

11 On Cicero's civic and religious views, see Wood, *Cicero's Social and Political Thought* (1991).

12 See Fubini, *Humanism and Secularization: From Petrarch to Valla* (2003), and Rummel, ed., *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* (2008).

13 More, *Utopia* (2016). Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (2009). On Machiavelli's own irreligion in his published writings, see Brown, "Philosophy and Religion in Machiavelli" (2010). De Grazia's biography *Machiavelli in Hell* (1988) resorts

to extracting a handful of clichéd phrases from Machiavelli's poetry, ghostwriting, and letters in order to argue that "He knows God exists," but this facile method could convict most any unbeliever of theism. On Strozzi, see Landon, *Lorenzo Di Filippo Strozzi and Niccolo Machiavelli* (2013).

14 De Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America* (1990), chap. 16. La Mothe Le Vayer, *De la Vertu des Païens* (2004). On La Mothe Le Vayer, see Neto, *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-Century French Philosophy: The Charronian Legacy 1601–1662* (2015), chap. 4. Consult Mungello, ed., *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (1989); Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729: The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (1990), chap. 5; Wenchao, "Confucius and the Early Enlightenment in. Germany from Leibniz to Bilfinger" (2012); and Larrimore, "Orientalism and Antivoluntarism in the History of Ethics: On Christian Wolff's 'Oratio de Sinarum Philosophia Practica' " (2000).

15 Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1996), chaps. 31, 34.

16 See Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* (2006). Also consult Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (1997); Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (2011); and Dobbs-Weinstein, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion and Its Heirs: Marx, Benjamin, Adorno* (2015).

17 Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet* (2000), pp. 134–141. On Bayle and atheism, see Beiner, "Bayle's Republic of Atheists," in Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (2010), pp. 176–188. Shaftesbury, "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit" (1699/1999), pp. 190–192. Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness* (1720), p. 4. Hutcheson argued that virtuous people will love God, but good deeds done for their own sake without considering divine sanction are equally virtuous, in *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, With Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (1728), pp. 331–333.

18 Meslier, *Testament: Memoir of the Thoughts and Sentiments of Jean Meslier* (2009), p. 45.

19 On Vico, consult Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination* (1991), and Mali, *The Rehabilitation of Myth: Vico's New Science* (2002).

20 Bayle, *Bayle: Political Writings* (2000). Rousseau, *On Philosophy, Morality, and Religion* (2007). Voltaire, *Political Writings* (1994). On Voltaire, see Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* (1969). On Allan, see Walters, *Revolutionary Deists: Early America's Rational Infidels* (2011), chap. 3. On Gibbon, see Foster, *Melancholy Duty: The Hume-Gibbon Attack on Christianity* (2013). On these authors, also consult Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (1998); Broadie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (2003); and Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism From Hume to Mill* (2003).

21 La Mettrie, *Man a Machine and Man a Plant* (1994), p. 76. See Wellman, *La Mettrie: Medicine, Philosophy, and Enlightenment* (1992).

22 D'Holbach, *The System of Nature: Or Laws of the Moral and Physical World* (1889), p. 310.

23 Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings* (2007), p. 15. See Lemmens, "Hume's Atheistic Agenda: Philo's Confession in *Dialogues*, 12" (2012).

24 Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1996). Interpretations of Kant's theology have only multiplied since Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion* (1970). Michalson connects a line of influence from Kant and Protestant individualism towards agnostic secularity in *Kant and the Problem of God* (1999).

25 Condorcet, *Oueuvres of Condorcet Tome I* (1847), p. 87.
26 Condorcet, *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1796), p. 203. Another expression of atheism from Condorcet is this statement: "There does not exist any religious system, or supernatural extravagance, which is not founded on an ignorance of the laws of nature. The inventors and defenders of these absurdities could not foresee the successive progress of the human mind" (p. 236) Consult Williams, *Condorcet and Modernity* (2004).
27 On Bentham, see McKown, *Behold the Antichrist: Bentham on Religion* (2004). Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (1885). See Rosen, *Mill* (2013), chap. 12.
28 On Huxley, see Paradis, ed., *Evolution & Ethics: T.H. Huxley's "Evolution and Ethics" with New Essays on Its Victorian and Sociobiological Context* (1989), and Stanley, *Huxley's Church and Maxwell's Demon: From Theistic Science to Naturalistic Science* (2014). See also Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860–1945* (1997), and Hurka, *British Ethical Theorists From Sidgwick to Ewing* (2014).
29 Consult Wiener, *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism* (1949); Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory* (1993); and Shook, *Dewey's Social Philosophy: Democracy as Education* (2014).
30 Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1957), p. 24. See also Russell, *Russell on Ethics: Selections From the Writings of Bertrand Russell* (2013).
31 Ingersoll, *The Gods* (1878). See Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought* (2013). On Nietzsche and atheology, consult Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion* (2006); and Franco, *Nietzsche's Enlightenment: The Free-Spirit Trilogy of the Middle Period* (2011). On Mencken see his *Treatise on the Gods* (1930), and Joshi, ed., *H. L. Mencken on Religion* (2002). Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism* (1987). Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007).
32 On the social sciences and religion, the reader may begin by consulting Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion* (1987), and Cipriani, *The Sociology of Religion: An Historical Introduction* (2000); and Davie, *The Sociology of Religion: A Critical Agenda* (2013).
33 These problematic violations and additional fallacies identified by this section are sometimes apprehended, but not overcome, by otherwise thorough works, such as Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (1999); Wainwright, *Religion and Morality* (2005); Baggett and Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (2011); Murphy, *God and Moral Law: On the Theistic Explanation of Morality* (2011); Ward, *Morality, Autonomy, and God* (2013); Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (2013); and Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (2016). Efforts to morally justify an ancient deity's ways to humanity are undertaken by Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (2011), and Bergmann et al., ed., *Divine Evil? The Moral Character of the God of Abraham* (2011). Grounding morality on god's motivations is explored in Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (2004). A survey of nontheist objections to divine explanations for morality is given by Martin, *Atheism, Morality, and Meaning* (2002). A concise indictment against the Judeo-Christian god is Avalos, "Yahweh Is a Moral Monster" (2010).
34 See Shook, "Humanism, Moral Relativism, and Ethical Objectivism" (2015).
35 A good introduction to epistemology is Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (2011). For a strongly realist account of truth see Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (1997).
36 Copan, "The Moral Argument" (2004), p. 157.
37 This carefully delimited version of the Is-Ought fallacy is not offered as Hume's final word on the matter, if he ever had one. The reader can consult Pigden,

ed., *Hume on Is and Ought* (2010), and Botros, *Hume, Reason and Morality: A Legacy of Contradiction* (2012).

38 William Lane Craig, "Slaughter of the Canaanites" at www.reasonablefaith.org/slaughter-of-the-canaanites, accessed 1 July 2017.

39 Surveys of issues and theories in theodicy are O'Connor, *God and Inscrutable Evil: In Defense of Theism and Atheism* (1998); Rowe, *God and the Problem of Evil* (2001); Søvik, *The Problem of Evil and the Power of God* (2011); and McGraw and Arp, ed., *The Problem of Evil: New Philosophical Directions* (2016). Intriguing works in theodicy questioning traditional views of divinity and providence include Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (1976); Inbody, *The Transforming God: An Interpretation of Suffering and Evil* (1997); Hasker, *The Triumph of God Over Evil: Theodicy for a World of Suffering* (2008); and Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (2009). See also Frances, *Gratuitous Suffering and the Problem of Evil* (2013). For a broader perspective, see Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (2004). Islam has produced creative theodices; see for example Inati, *The Problem of Evil: Ibn Sînâ's Theodicy* (2000). On Hinduism and Buddhism, see Herman, *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought* (1993).

40 See Shook, "What the Hell Is God Up To? God's Evils and the Theodicies Holding God Responsible." (2016).

41 See analyses of the Euthyphro Dilemma in the context of Socratic and Platonic views of religion in Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (1990).

42 Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works* (1994), Book 1, p. 111. Spinoza himself rejected the dilemma's premise, that goodness can be attributed to god/nature. See Nadler, "Spinoza in the Garden of Good and Evil" (2001). David Hume also argued, on skeptical rather than metaphysical grounds, that god cannot be regarded as good; consult Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity: Hume's Moral Atheism* (2010), and Yoder, *Hume on God: Irony, Deism and Genuine Theism* (2011).

43 The problem of evil is but one of many theological issues raised in Dostoevsky's works. See Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion* (2005), and Lewy, *If God Is Dead, Everything Is Permitted?* (2011). Frede explores Dostoevsky's intellectual context in *Doubt, Atheism, and the Nineteenth-Century Russian Intelligentsia* (2011).

44 Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (2006), p. 111. The bracketed translations are in the original.

45 Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* (1996), p. 357.

46 Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1996), pp. 165–166.

47 See Hare, "Kant on the Rational Instability of Atheism" (2005). Van Impe argues that the atheism can avoid moral despair by endorsing a telos to nature, or viewing nature itself, as destined for supreme goodness in "Kant's Moral Theism and Moral Despair Argument Against Atheism" (2014). Atheology has no objection to optimistic religious naturalisms, but Moral atheology goes no further than showing how atheists are not unreasonable for being dutifully moral.

48 These criticisms only capture a few of the many concerns about Kant's moral theism. Consult Rossi and Wreen, ed., *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered* (1991); Firestone and Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant's Religion* (2008); Pasternack, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant on Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (2013); and Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (2016).

49 This quotation is Trotter's translation in Pascal, *Thoughts, Letters, and Minor Works* (1910), p. 85 (Dover reprint, p. 67). A slightly different translation by Ariew is in Pascal, *Pensées* (2005), pp. 212–213.

50 On the wager's role within the larger context of Pascal's religious philosophy, see Moriarty, "Grace and Religious Belief in Pascal" (2006). See also Jordan, ed., *Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal's Wager* (1994), and Jordan, *Pascal's Wager: Pragmatic Arguments and Belief in God* (2006). Compare Pascal with James, *The Will to Believe* (1897), chap. 1. Also consult Bishop, *Believing by Faith* (2007).

10 Civil Atheology

Civil theology (or political theology) concerns the relations between religious people and their civil authorities. Traditional civil theology specifically examines relationships, both supportive and strained, between the authority of God and the authority of the State. Civil theology offers judgments about the extent of divine supervision and providence over politics, the duties to align public law with divine law, and the bounds of civil obedience from the faithful. Some radical theologians deny that earthly government has authority over true believers, while others think that god is largely indifferent to civic affairs. The kind of civil theology to which Civil atheology stands opposed is able to agree in principle that civil authority can be legitimate, but it argues that theism is essential to a government's legitimacy and competency. Perhaps government requires guidance from divine rule, or government at least needs citizens made amenable to social order by theism. Civil atheology sees no need for a deity, and points out theism's disruptions of stable politics and its threats to equality and justice.[1] Gods inimical to those civil ends should be banished from human memory.

Civil atheology appeals to human rights, civil rights and liberties, and social justice in order to argue that god-belief should be abandoned to advance the full realization of those ideals. Faulting religious convictions for disrupting the peace and fostering hatred and violence is nothing new; religions have been blaming each other for incivilities long before atheology agreed with all of them. If each war must have a single main cause (which is not typical of most wars), religion is usually not it, if the entirety of world history is surveyed.[2] However, theistic convictions can encourage followers to believe that mundane causes of war are truly worth killing and dying for, and theism can keep groups divided by hatreds so fierce that only horrible hells are good enough for one's enemies. Non-theistic religions are no less capable of such incivilities, but atheology focuses on godly beings for criticism. Political philosophy is the field where tensions between politics and religious traditions are examined. Designing a "civil religion" can relieve religious-political tensions with a vaguely theistic or deistic nationalism for public observance, but civil theology more fundamentally asks how the political sphere can gain god's approval. For Civil atheology, nothing godly is responsible for politics or the ideals framing good government.

It is not Civil atheology's view that unbelief is prerequisite for either the recognition of political ideals or the establishment of political orders to fulfill them. Nor does Civil atheology accede to extreme liberalisms or political secularisms that deny faith's compatibility with public citizenship or legitimate government. On the other hand, Civil atheology cannot see why theistic faith must be a prerequisite for moral virtues permitting social order and legal compliance. Civil atheology acknowledges Moral atheology's rejection of arguments asserting that morality is dependent on a deity. The contest between civil theology and Civil atheology proceeds where the consequences of theism impact the realization of social and political ideals.

Civil Atheology and Secularism

Civil atheology stands out from the wider field of religious criticism. Religious criticism of an uncivil religion appeals to social norms and local laws to condemn religious conduct and religious groups, but it does not target god-belief directly. For example, religious criticism aimed at a denomination that endorsed terrible wrongs against innocent persons is the sort of criticism typically encouraging disaffiliation from that denomination, and perhaps calling for that denomination's dissolution. However, people leaving that denomination may shift allegiance to a better behaving denomination, or stop going to church altogether, while retaining their belief in god. Exposing how deeds done in the name of religion threaten social justice or individual rights has no direct bearing on whether people should abandon faith in their god. Similarly, recounting how people of faith have used their political energies to advance their vision of justice and rights has no connection to the matter of god's existence. Religious convictions are evidently effective forces in the political realm—but is there a real god behind that faith?

Political secularism offers reasons why the activity and influence of religiosity should be restrained in politics, but those reasons do not imply that unbelief is preferable or atheism should become the norm. Criticizing religious institutions or religious doctrines is not the same thing as criticizing a divine power. Nor is protecting religious people and churches the same thing as proving that theism is correct. Civil atheology is not concerned with these sorts of questions:

> What are legitimate values favoring legislation, and what kinds of values have no place in politics?
>
> How should religious liberties be protected against government interference and oppression?
>
> Is there a place for group rights held by religious communities who reside within democratic societies?
>
> Where should religious people and institutions enjoy privileged exemptions from uniform law?

Are there any legitimate functions of government that can favor secularity over religiosity?

Which forms of government are more compatible with religion(s) and religious goals in this world?

How should governments deal with forms of religion hostile to political law and order?

What should be done when a government is drifting towards theocratic, or secular, tyranny?

Political secularism is the partner in direct dialogue with civil theology about these kinds of important issues. Only where philosophical stands against theism are needed, such as denying that god is the reason why governing can be civilly right, or holding god and god-belief responsible for uncivil wrongs, does Civil atheology emerge. Civil atheology, due to its advocacy of justice and basic rights, happens to align well with the political traditions of constitutional republicanism and its modern form in rights-based democracy. Civil theologies opposed to representative government receive Civil atheology's condemnation, while civil theologies recommending religious acquiescence to democratic constitutions have Civil atheology's toleration.[3] However, concerns from contemporary political theology about what it perceives as rampant liberalism or oppressive secularism are complaints that leave Civil atheology untouched.

Religion may be an "opiate of the people" as Karl Marx declared, but that consummate civil atheologian knew better than to assume that deconverting people into atheists is the short-cut to political liberation.[4] Liberation arrives with wise commitments to ideals of freedom and justice. Marxist versions of those ideals do not agree with versions defended by rival political theories, but all secular political theories expect religious people to civilly respect worthy civic ideals. Realizing how devotion to a god may pervert or obstruct worthy political ideals supplies the cue for Civil atheology to assemble a case for abandoning such devotion.

Marx was not the first Western thinker to charge that religion can be inimical to civil society and good government. In his political treatise *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes repeatedly attacks the civil theologies of both Catholic and Protestant traditions. So long as religious authorities can impose theological doctrines on populations, political order will be disrupted and citizens will remain divided by hostilities. Hobbes sorts out what could possibly be true of God (functioning as a material first cause), and what must be false of God (providentially guiding or commanding the world, for example). The popular Christianity preached to the people must therefore be classified with lies, tales, and frightening superstitions. This Christianity is far from harmless; it should be eliminated to save an easily corrupted society from itself.

> [E]vill men under pretext that God can do anything, are so bold as to say any thing when it serves their turn, though they think it untrue; It is the part of a wise man, to believe them no further, than right reason makes that which they say, appear credible. If this superstitious fear of Spirits were taken away, and with it, Prognostiques from Dreams, false Prophecies, and many other things depending thereon, by which, crafty ambitious persons abuse the simple people, men would be much more fitted than they are for civill Obedience.[5]

Hobbes does not claim that religion in its entirety is deleterious to proper government. Although religion is never in any reasonable position to pass judgment on the legitimacy of government, and individual conscience is no excuse to violate the law, some religion may remain useful so long as the sovereign government promotes a unitary and simplified creed to promote the peace.[6] This religion for a country's population may be labeled as an established civil religion.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was not a materialist or a pessimist about human nature, yet his book *The Social Contract* (1762) agreed with Hobbes that civil authority cannot be divided between spiritual and civil institutions. Rousseau goes further than Hobbes by denying that government should establish a religious institution for society, even a Christian society. Christianity has no authority to speak on anything, even on matters of salvation or ethics, because no religion is in a better position to describe eternal matters, or dictate earthly virtues, than any other religion. Indeed, religion typically fosters dependency and degradation, unsuitable traits for any free people. Christianity, according to Rousseau, is no exception:

> But I am mistaken in speaking of a Christian republic: each of these two words excludes the other. Christianity preaches nothing but servitude and dependence. Its spirit is too favourable to tyranny for tyranny not always to profit from it. True Christians are made to be slaves. They know it and are scarcely moved by it; this brief life has too little value in their eyes.[7]

The materialist atheists also contributed to Civil atheology. For example, Baron d'Holbach joined the social contract school while omitting any role for religious belief or civil religion, in a group of books which he published anonymously during the 1770s: *Système de la nature* (System of Nature, 1770), *La politique naturelle* (Natural Politics, 1773), *Système social* (The Social System, 1773), *La morale universelle* (Universal Morality, 1776), and *Ethocratie, ou le Gouvernement foundé sur la morale* (Ethnocracy, or Government founded on Morality, 1776).

In the wake of the American and French Revolutions, Civil atheology continued to contribute to the vibrancy of social and political theorizing during the nineteenth century. Liberation from civil theology was not made

in a single leap, as the next section recounts. The theoretical stages proceeding from (1) amending a religion so it can fulfill civil purposes, to (2) abandoning a religion to substitute a simple common creed for civil religion, on to (3) excluding religion from taking responsibility for civil society and good government, are three major stages towards Civil atheology's critical scrutiny of god-belief. That scrutiny defends worthy ideals about rights and justice, without showing partiality towards unbelief, assuming secularization's growth, or predicting secularity's popularity. At a stage beyond Civil atheology, the agendas of secularism have pursued equal status for the nonreligious and encouraged the growth of secularity in society.[8]

Civil theology is not hard to recognize, although it takes diverse forms. In the United States, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, who served from 1811 to 1845, described core tenets:

> The promulgation of the great doctrines of religion; the being and attributes and providence of one Almighty God; the responsibility to Him for all our actions; founded upon moral freedom and accountability; a future state of rewards and punishments; the cultivation of all the personal, social, and benevolent virtues;—these never can be a matter of indifference in any well-ordered community. It is, indeed, difficult to conceive how any civil society can well exist without them. And, at all events, it is impossible for those who believe in the truth of Christianity as Divine revelation, to doubt that it is the especial duty of government to foster and encourage it among all the citizens and subjects.

As he continues in this manner, he could not sound more dubious about secular government:

> It yet remains a problem to be solved in human affairs whether any free government can be permanent where the public worship of God and the support of religion constitute no part of the policy or duty of the state in assignable shape.[9]

A government for free citizens requires those citizens to commit to principles of morality and civility, and both those principles and a firm commitment to them in turn depend on the right religious piety, according to Story. Furthermore, pious Christians respect a government helping to indoctrinate that piety.

Atheology stands against indoctrination. Free government requires free citizens. Government is not the only thing that could threaten freedom, however—one portion of the people can manage to dominate and oppress another portion, and easily crush the liberty of a single individual. Great political thinkers of the West, surveyed in the next section, kept individual freedom and justice for each citizen at the forefront of their concerns for erecting a legitimate republic. Belonging to that mainstream tradition,

political secularism and Civil atheology never overlook freedom. Freedom is neglected by critics of secularism dismayed by obstacles encountered by churches seeking legal privileges and exemptions from uniform law.

Charles Taylor, for example, omits freedom from his account of religious-secular relations. Taylor's essay "What Does Secularism Mean?" recites Joseph Story's version of civil theology, and allows that it narrowly privileged only Christian denominations. How did secularism help matters? Taylor ponders that question without finding a clear answer—although his American readers would soon think of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. After complaining that typical views of secularism leave matters more confused than ever, he announces his correction:

> Now I believe that one of our basic difficulties in dealing with these problems is that we have the wrong model, which has a continuing hold on our minds. We think that secularism (or laïcité) has to do with the relation of the state and religion; whereas in fact it has to do with the (correct) response of the democratic state to diversity.[10]

"Diversity" is not intended to primarily point to individuals in their uniqueness. Taylor is here mainly referring to the diversity of religious groups each seeking favored status in some form or another. Apparently, Story's only misstep was his inclusion of just Christian denominations.

According to the tradition of secular government and civil rights, no power should be allowed to diminish individual liberties. But Taylor expects a democratic government to be most solicitous of the needs of religious groups, overlooking how religious groups are entirely capable of controlling the lives of their followers and imposing their creeds and practices on others. If the freedom of religious groups to do what they want is the paramount issue for a democracy, what might be expected from such religious license? Given the opportunity, religious groups will compete with each other for governmental privileges, and negotiate among each other to attain preferred status from the state. Once privileges and preferments are in place, the uniformity of law erodes away, and a distinction between first-class and second-class citizenship will arise. Taylor's platitude about all groups being "treated even-handedly" is a band-aid upon deep wounds from social tensions caused by multiplying religious interferences in civic life. As for nonreligious people, they are not walking away from churches in order to accept Taylor's invitation to join an irreligious denomination just to preserve equal citizenship status and compete for equal government recognition.

Freedom is not the privilege or property of religious membership, or membership in any identifiable group. A democracy must at least be a republic of equal citizens, or else it devolves into a social contract bargain among social factions eager to control the lives of their constituencies. The essence of the idea of a republic is the defense of freedom as non-domination.[11] Not suffering the domination of one's fellow citizens is just as crucial as

the liberty of non-domination by government powers. One's political rights cannot depend on having the right friends, neighbors, or associates, or sharing approved social identities or worldviews.

Ancient and Medieval Civil Atheology

If Christian theology were the foundational system of thought from which all Western secularism must spring, as some have argued,[12] then starting from Emperor Constantine's rule or Augustine's *City of God* would make sense. However, the oldest Western model of government uncontrolled by religion is Aristotle's. Most civil atheologians and political secularists consulted, and often explicitly borrowed, features of Aristotelian political theory. It departs from Plato in several respects, including the role assigned for religion. Plato's vision of the finest republic expects its ruling guardians to believe that the supreme good (Plato's god) grounds all virtue and justice, and he authorizes these guardians to indoctrinate the populace into pious conformity with virtuous myths to achieve justice.[13] There is no civil theology in Aristotle. Aristotle was not an atheist, but his deity does not concern itself with worldly affairs, and it cannot pass judgment on law or politics. He made no constitutional provision for religion to receive legal privileges or governing powers. Aristotle's plans for a just government therefore embody a basic kind of political secularism.

Aristotle's *Politics* does expect political leadership to put on displays of public respect for popular religion, and government can subsidize a sensible civil religion for the whole population (1329a26–34, 1331b4–5). Priests would be chosen by vote or by lot to fill superintendent roles, but they are not to be regarded as rulers holding political offices (1299a16–28). The idea of religious leaders attempting to use public office to enforce denominational creeds on everyone, or legislators trying to enact into law what some churches think is God's will, would not have impressed Aristotle. The functions of religion and government are too different. To point out that both religion and government aim at human virtue and welfare could not, within Aristotle's philosophical system, justify the non-Aristotelian idea that one institution should do the work of the other. Aristotle was not a secularist by modern standards, although religious partisans unhappy with his aloof prime mover or his non-theocratic constitutionalism vehemently attacked his politics. His preferred forms of government exemplify moderate political secularism. The justification for government and the principles of good government have nothing to do with religious convictions or divine sanctions, and neither religion nor government have a justification to control the other.[14]

A similar form of moderate political secularism results from Cicero's reflections on politics in the context of Roman government. Cicero named his two central writings on political theory, composed between 54 and 51 BCE, as *The Republic* (*De re publica*) and *The Laws* (*De legibus*) after

Platonic dialogues, but he is more Aristotelian in practice. Moral philosophy, not religion, discerns the justification for living under governments and tests governments for their ability to satisfy the demands of justice. In *The Republic* we are told that "the commonwealth is the concern of a people . . . associated with one another through agreement on law and community of interest" (Book I, 39a).[15] The basic political unit, the commonwealth, is not the same thing as the government of ruling officials. The commonwealth is the property of a free people, and the people assent to a government of officials who are supposed to maintain the legal equality of everyone, including themselves, for the common good (Book I, 51–53).[16] A government that fails to respect the rule of law, the welfare of society, and private property (priorities in Cicero's *De officiis*), has abandoned justice, which according to Cicero implies that the commonwealth is in jeopardy of dissolution, since the people form a commonwealth to preserve their equal freedom and security. Nothing religious compels the people to form commonwealths or submit to governments, and governments and their officials ultimately answer to the people, not to religions. Cicero lends some credence to the Stoic view that the gods directly or indirectly supply models of moral and civil laws. However, he was more of an Academic Skeptic himself, so his own theoretical views did not ultimately appeal to any religious matters for sanction. The people should participate in the common religion and religion supports virtue, but no religion would be able to dictate whether a government is just or whether it enacts the right laws.[17]

The classical heritage of political theory, as it was rediscovered and revived during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, taught that any institution that would rule a free people must not threaten tyranny (by being a power above the law) or insecurity (by being a cause of civil strife). The ancient Greeks and Romans did not have to confront the political problem of a popular yet potentially uncivil religion. That problem was confronted by two of the greatest intellectuals of the fourteenth century, who inspired a radical shift in European political philosophy. Marsilius of Padua (c.1275–c.1342) was an Italian writing in Paris, France; while William of Ockham (c.1287–1347) was an Englishman writing in Munich, Germany. Marsilius's treatise *Defensor Pacis* (The Defender of the Peace, 1324) and Ockham's *Breviloquium de principatu tyrannico super divina et humana* (A Short Discourse on the Tyrannical Government Over Things Divine and Human, 1342) both denied that the Catholic Church should have authority over worldly affairs, for which the state is solely responsible. These two thinkers were the first Europeans to advocate not just forms of political secularism, but also to engage in Civil atheology.

Marsilius of Padua, a philosopher and political theorist, was tightly connected to the resurgence of admiration for Aristotelian philosophy in some northern Italian city-states including Padua. He prudently refrained from signaling any deviation from Christian orthodoxy concerning its God, however, and his reliance on natural reason to demonstrate God's existence and

powers allowed him to take a more robust position about human knowledge about God than Ockham's skeptical position. What brought charges of heresy and atheism down upon him had to do with Marsilius's subversive strategy of describing the atheological views of other philosophers in the course of pursuing his own anti-clerical and anti-theocratic stances. On his account, although philosophers going back to Presocratics did not prove much about God with any accuracy, he can say that

> . . . philosophers . . . have—very aptly—paid attention to an entirely different reason for handing down divine religions or followings, and one that is all-but-necessary for the status of this world. And this was the goodness of human actions both as individuals and as citizens, upon which the calm or tranquillity of communities, and ultimately the sufficient life of this present world, almost wholly depends. For even if the various philosophers who invented these religions or followings may not have perceived or believed in the resurrection of men and the life that is called eternal, they nevertheless developed and encouraged the fiction of its existence, including the delights and afflictions it contained in relation to the nature of human deeds in this mortal life, in order thereby to induce in men a reverence and fear of God and a desire to avoid the vices and cultivate the virtues.[18]

Inventing religions and assigning priests to serve earthly needs may be characteristic of pagan societies, but that is not Christianity's origin, Marsilius reminds his readers. God has directly instructed the people through Holy Scripture how to accord with divine wishes, and priests serve those salvific goals. Let philosophers attend to the needs of people in this life; let priests attend to the needs of people in the next life.

> The end, therefore, of the priestly part is the instruction and education of men on the subject of those things which, according to the evangelical law, it is necessary to believe, do, or omit in order to attain eternal salvation and avoid eternal misery.[19]

Marsilius proceeds to argue that ecclesiastical offices have no proper role in legislative or judicial affairs because the salvation of the people is not a priority of a legitimate government. The Church should not own vast properties and material wealth, and priests should get used to poverty instead of authority. Even the power of excommunication has no effect in this world. Divine law is separate from civil law and divine law cannot shape civil law; civil law is the privilege and possession of the people as a whole, not any church. This philosophical justification of the secular state and political secularism is only the half-way stage for Marsilius. A religious institution promulgating doctrines about ecclesiastical authority over secular matters is making both a religious and political error, and has become an enemy of

the people, according to Marsilius. The religious institution in question for Marsilius is the Catholic Church and its heretical leaders who threaten an "unjust despotism upon the Christian faithful."[20]

By accusing Church leadership, not excepting its Popes, of occasionally teaching false doctrines about Christian duties and Church authority, Marsilius proceeds to the stage of Civil atheology. Christians should not believe in the kind of God or the sort of divine commands depicted by such heresies because, in Marsilius's view, not only do they raise the risk of afterlife perdition, those religious convictions subvert the worldly order of civil society and threaten civil government defending that peaceful order. If the defender of the peace is always and only the just state, then it must be hostile towards any uncivil religion and antagonistic to un-Biblical and destabilizing religious teachings. It was precisely this verdict of Civil atheology and immoderate political secularism which aroused the harshest condemnations from the Church. Marsilius all but declared that the State has the right to regulate what the Church teaches within its political borders insofar as those doctrines may detract from the capacity of religious believers to be free and equal citizens under a just government. The state need not be neutral towards all religion; in the promotion of secular politics, the government may regulate aspects of religion. This conclusion falls short of full caesaropapism, which awards to the head of government supreme authority over all religious matters, but any earthly prince would enjoy considerable latitude interfering with church affairs within his country and negotiating with Church powers beyond his borders. The political theory of Marsilius was applied to justify the perennial goal of whoever became Holy Roman Emperor to exercise more control over the Church and the Papacy.[21]

Like Marsilius, Ockham remained secure in his own faith and respected priests who worked in poverty among the people to preach and save souls. He became the most notorious theologian of his age for similarly challenging the authority of medieval scholasticism and the Church Papacy. He was decreed to be a heretic and excommunicated for apostasy by Pope John XXII, but Ockham fearlessly judged that Pope, along with two other Popes, to be the real heretics. His radical philosophical views, combined with his reliance on scripture, presaged much of the Protestant Reformation and the separation of church and state, alongside his exemplification of the spirit of scientific inquiry. Against Aristotelian metaphysics, Ockham preferred nominalism and individualism, and reformed Aristotelian physics towards more empirical and mathematical treatments. He affirmed the existence of free will to choose one's ends, the possibility of a "virtuous pagan," and the right to reason out matters for one's self. Doctrines about the soul, immortality, divinity, and creation cannot be discovered by experience or reason; only trust in faith supports them.

Ockham's treatises during the 1330s and 1340s, especially *A Short Discourse on the Tyrannical Government over Things Divine and Human*

(1342), argued for individual independence from Church dogma and the political independence of secular states from Church authority. Like Marsilius, Ockham ridiculed the way that Popes brandished the threat of excommunication. Only when is demonstrated to a person that a view is contrary to literal scripture would that person be a heretic, implying that a person's sound reading of the Bible is more authoritative than a Pope or the whole Church. After all, Ockham argued, neither the Church hierarchy nor any Popes enjoy higher infallibility, or the right to impose their will on Christians. In fact, reasoned Ockham, Christians have a duty to depose heretical Popes harming the Church. The Church should stay focused on spiritual matters, not secular politics or worldly wealth, since the Bible does not authorize Church interference in secular government.[22]

Modern Civil Atheology

Niccolò Machiavelli's treatises, *The Prince* (1513) and *Discourses* (1531), uphold secular government: the justification for government is worldly, the principles of sound government have no religious basis or purpose, and the government should not be controlled by any religious institution. The Churches has no privileged authority over any legal or juridical matters, while a ruler's powers are theoretically unlimited, although retaining the confidence of the people places practical limits on the ruler's actions. A wise ruler seeks the reputation for virtue and justice, but submission to creeds could only hold rulers back from executing the great and terrible deeds they must commit for the good of the state. Religion cannot know what is best for the people in their earthly affairs, and religious ethics is for the powerless, not the powerful.

Machiavelli ventures into Civil atheology by criticizing Christianity for weakening the moral courage of Europe.

> For our religion, having shown the truth and the true way, makes us esteem less the honor of the world, whereas the Gentiles, esteeming it very much and having placed the highest good in it, were more ferocious in their actions. . . . Besides this, the ancient religion did not beatify men if they were not full of worldly glory, as were captains of armies and princes of republics. Our religion has glorified humble and contemplative more than active men. It has then placed the highest good in humility, abjectness, and contempt of things human; the other placed it in greatness of spirit, strength of body, and all other things capable of making men very strong. And if our religion asks that you have strength in yourself, it wishes you to be capable more of suffering than of doing something strong. . . . And although the world appears to be made effeminate and heaven disarmed, it arises without doubt more from the cowardice of the men who have interpreted our religion according to idleness and not according to virtue.[23]

Anticipating a theme in Friedrich Nietzsche, of what value is a deity who expects us to be morally weak and vulnerable to losing our liberty? This is now a matter for Civil atheology, not civil theology. The intellectual who can perceive how pagan Rome embodied authentic virtues in its religious life to a far greater degree than Christianity under the Papacy is in a position to see how god could be intelligently designed according to civil needs, not supernatural hopes. Machiavelli easily admits that sound religion can support civic order: "Whoever considers well the Roman histories sees how much religion served to command armies, to animate the plebs, to keep men good, to bring shame to the wicked."[24] Religion tames the people to obedience to civil laws, but the people's submissive reverence for the sacred is the only necessary factor; no actual deity has anything to do with making or enforcing law.

> And truly there was never an orderer of extraordinary laws for a people who did not have recourse to God, because otherwise they would not have been accepted. For a prudent individual knows many goods that do not have in themselves evident reasons with which one can persuade others. Thus wise men who wish to take away this difficulty have recourse to God.[25]

Turning Marsilius around, Machiavelli praises the philosophical inventor of Roman religion, while caring little about whether a religion is true. When Machiavelli judges that the state will resort to god because a feared ruler can only rule for so long, he is not praising god-belief for its accuracy about a deity, but only its utility. Reducing religion to its serviceability for the purposes of the secular state is a strategy taken by Civil atheology to support a kind of moderate political secularism in which the government manipulates popular religion.[26]

After Machiavelli and preceding Hobbes, there was the Venetian political reformer, secularist, and materialist Paolo Sarpi (*Pensieri*, c.1580–90s).[27] But Thomas Hobbes was the greatest civil atheologian of the seventeenth century, just as he exemplified the potent combination of materialism and skepticism. Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) argued that scripture is genuinely about god only so far as reason permits, and scripture is regulative for conduct only so far as a lawful commonwealth commands. Hobbes was a freethinker, a rationalist, and a secular philosopher, who was skeptical towards religious claims and hopeful about replacing religious dogma and sacred theology with natural philosophy, natural law, and civil politics. Hobbes could be comfortable speaking of natural law, but he only referred to laws of nature itself, without any supernatural command or construction involved. He proclaimed himself to be Christian only within the thin legal sense that he technically obeyed vague religious edicts in force during those times of monarchical upheaval. His *Historia Ecclesiastica* (1688) raised numerous points of Moral and Civil atheology as he reduced the history of religion to a tale of human credulity and priestly domination.[28]

A series of legal and political philosophers after Hobbes completed the foundations to a fully secular approach to government. Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) appealed to natural reason and natural law alone in *De Iure Belli ac Pacis* (On the Law of War and Peace, 1625) and other treatises, in order to justify his position that the government should serve worldly ends, enforce only minimal Christianity-inspired law, and refrain from persecuting religious dissenters. Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–94) agreed that natural reason is sufficient to account for the natural rights which in turn justify the state's functions. He dropped the expectation that the government must base some secular law upon Biblical injunctions in his treatise *De officio hominis et civis juxta legem naturalem* (On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law, 1673). Although the government can punish open dissent against the established common religion, it should ignore private nonconformity.[29] Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) extended these political foundations in an even further secular direction. His works, especially *Fundamenta Juris Naturae et Gentium* (Foundations of the Law of Nature and Nations, 1705), leaves no special role for theology or revelation in political theory, and provides for a strict separation of civil law apart from morality (following Hobbes). Although a government can regulate public expressions of religious observance and practice in order to protect the civil peace, civil law should not attempt to enforce creeds and confessions. He advocated freedom of thought and speech about religion, and he was the first significant political thinker in Europe to hold that atheists should not be criminally punished, although they can be banished.[30]

Thomasius reached a conclusion that was also supported by John Locke (1632–1704) in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689): the state has no proper interest in criminalizing dissent from articles of faith. The toleration of religious difference is required, although legal regulations on forms of public worship are permitted. Locke did ground political rights upon theological premises about divine support for human rights, however. The momentum behind political secularism and Civil atheology then gradually shifted to France. Hostility towards to religious superstition, theological mystification, and ecclesiastical tyranny grew faster during the eighteenth century in Northern Europe. Voltaire was the most notorious intellectual calling for an abrupt end to the Church's domination over the entire civic realm. For his part, Diderot could agree that religion has no natural right, nor sufficient justification, to rule over civil society. His article on "Political Authority" in his *Encyclopédie* (vol. 1, 1751) declared, "No man has by nature been granted the right to command others." For Diderot, rightful authority ultimately rests on the consent of people conferring authority. God has supreme authority over humanity, but never exercises it on earth, permitting societies to construct their own social order. Religiosity therefore has no useful place in politics.[31]

In other writings, Diderot expresses greater skepticism about God's existence and providence, and stronger confidence in the ability of people to be

moral without having to be pious. By his reasoning, neither personal atheism nor public impiety can be a threat to stable society or good government. Indeed, Diderot's many oblique characterizations of Christianity across his articles in the *Encyclopédie* raise worries over sanctimonious piety's deleterious effects on morality and civility. Suspicions that Diderot agreed with radicals defending the toleration of civil impiety could be confirmed by reading between his lines. In effect, across his most radical writings, Diderot offered an atheological combination of skepticism towards theism with irreligion in civil politics.[32] D'Holbach's *System of Nature* (1770) concurred, and went the farthest. He was the first atheist to claim that nonreligious people could be equally good (or better) neighbors and citizens, the first secularist to wholeheartedly proclaim that politics no longer required religious sentiment or theological support, and the first civil atheologian to argue the state is best founded on entirely nonreligious principles.

In America, Thomas Paine (1737–1809) and his book *Common Sense* (1776) appealed to individual liberties and the superiority of democracy over aristocracy and tyranny to support the call for political independence from England. His support for French Revolution resulted in a similar tract about natural rights, *The Rights of Man* (1791). Paine's notorious work, *The Age of Reason* (1793–94), advocated for a rationalistic and deistic religion against the irrationality of all revealed religion.[33] Paine's deistic basis for natural rights was not uncommon among political intellectuals in American and Europe during that revolutionary era. Political documents can be even more radical than their framers. France's new Constitution in 1791 was entirely secular, but it had an American model for inspiration.

The Constitution of the United States of America and its Bill of Rights (1787, 1791) was the most secular political document that the world had yet seen. Although one must look to other writings by its architects, such as James Madison, for philosophical and political foundations to the Constitution, its own Preamble indicates its intellectual heritage.

> We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The worldly purposes mentioned by Aristotle and Cicero down to Hobbes and Pufendorf are all listed here: harmony, justice, peace, security, happiness, and liberty. Nowhere in the Constitution is anything divine invoked to explain or justify those secular ideals. Furthermore, no law or official is permitted to regulate public worship or religious expression.

Gouverneur Morris (1752–1816) of New York penned this Preamble and much of the language of the Constitution to provide clear language for stating its delineation of governmental powers and offices. He was an

outspoken voice against slavery and for freedom of religion. He entirely agreed with James Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments" (1785), where Madison made this affirmation: "We maintain therefore that in matters of Religion, no man's right is abridged by the institution of Civil Society, and that Religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance."[34] Madison there labels the beliefs of personal conscience as "opinions" and effectively reduces religion to a matter beneath the state's notice or concern. Many Founders agreed with Madison that only a single right—the right to one's own religion—is a God-given right, and that right must be universally and equally respected precisely because theology cannot know religious truths and the state cannot either. If the state fulfills its secular duties for the people then it will flourish, regardless of whether the "right" religion supports it, or whether state officials support the "right" religion.

Not only does the U.S. Constitution forbid religious qualifications for political office, it forbids the government from interfering with the free exercise of religion and from helping to establish any religion for its citizens. This type of moderate secularism constitutionally separates church and state, as Thomas Jefferson indicated through his "wall of separation" metaphor in his 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists in Connecticut. That wall was not supposed to politically isolate legislating from religion. None of the Founders contemplated insulating the processes of democratic politics from the concerns or votes of religious citizens, as some twentieth-century liberal secularists did propose. But the Founders did intend to limit the capacity of government to penalize citizens for unpopular religious beliefs, or to promote one religious doctrine over others.[35]

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) was the most secular statesman of all the Founders. His widely read *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1782) included these notable lines:

> The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.[36]

This is the first published statement by an influential intellectual and statesman upholding the view that all atheists should be tolerated and left untouched by the law. Jefferson was also the clearest American voice of Civil atheology of his era, and the public figure most frequently accused of atheism. Privately, he wavered between philosophical deism and Epicurean materialism. Publicly, Jefferson was as vocal about criticizing Christianity for its crimes as any French secularist.

> Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we

> have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth.[37]

Jefferson persistently faulted religion for obstructing liberty. Dogmatic faith in God was not the remedy; reason and science must lead the way. He wrote these words in his last letter before his death:

> May it be to the world, what I believe it will be, (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all,) the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government. That form which we have substituted, restores the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion. All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.[38]

Twenty years after Jefferson's presidency had concluded, the young Republic was startled by the proud voice of another freethinker calling for liberty, justice, and the end of religion's reign: the immigrant from Scotland, Frances Wright (1795–1852). Her book on the philosophy of Epicurus titled *A Few Days in Athens* (1822) drew praise from Jefferson, and she visited him at his Monticello home in Virginia in 1824.

During 1828–29 Wright lectured in many cities from Boston to St. Louis in front of overflowing lecture halls and auditoriums, becoming the first woman in America to speak publicly before mixed crowds of men and women. Wright's audiences were aroused to enthusiasm, or incited to fury, upon hearing her condemnations of slavery, her endorsements of racial integration, and her declaration of women's equality with men. The greatest astonishment swept through crowds when she blamed religion for perpetuating these tyrannies, and openly advocated irreligion and disbelief. One of America's foremost preachers and theologians at the time, Lyman Beecher, immediately reacted with his own lectures against Wright's views, which he labeled as "skepticism" and "political atheism." Wright was the first woman editing a journal in America, which was named *The Free Enquirer* under her leadership and became the first openly atheistic serial published in the country. She inspired the next generation of free-thinking and nonreligious women advancing the cause of suffrage, such as Lucretia Mott (1793–1880) and Ernestine Rose (1810–92). This combination of suffrage and secularity culminated in the third generation of women's suffrage leadership, with two of the greatest female intellectuals of the nineteenth century and their feminist and civil atheologies: Elizabeth Cady Stanton

(1815–1902) and Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826–98). The African American struggle for civil rights had its own suffrage-secular combination in W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963), whose irreligious agnosticism was connected to his philosophical analysis of race relations.[39]

After America's independence, intellectuals in England gained momentum. Civil atheology surpassed political secularism by advancing the position that religion was more harmful than beneficial to the civil order and good government. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) endorsed political secularism and a Civil atheology quite critical of religion's harms in her twin philosophical works, *Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790) and *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Another thinker bridging social justice and irreligious secularity was Wollstonecraft's husband, the socialist William Godwin (1758–1836), who was deeply influenced by d'Holbach. His major treatise of secular political theory and Civil atheology was titled *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793). Another literary duo, Harriet Martineau (1802–76) and Henry George Atkinson (1812–c.1890) pursued sociological themes from Auguste Comte in their *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (1851), which closely aligned with positivism and materialism while critiquing organized religion.[40]

Civil atheology proved to be essential to the formulation of utilitarianism and communism. Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) advocated utilitarianism as the secular replacement for the moral guidance and social functions of religion. Karl Marx (1818–83) demanded the elimination of religion by progress of communism. Less radical thinkers still relied on Civil atheology as they pushed back against religious pretensions to legislate and adjudicate civil law. As the nineteenth century proceeded, more and more thinkers went far beyond launching religious criticism at harms caused by established religion. They advanced secular normative standards for ethics, social order, basic rights, and good government. And they increasing regarded religion as the bastion of traditional customs restricting humanity's freedoms and retarding humanity's progress. Twentieth-century heirs to the study of religion by social scientific methods, such as Max Horkheimer and Michel Foucault, sustained Civil atheology's historicist view of religiosity and advocated philosophy's critical supervision over religion on political grounds.[41]

Universal Ethics and Human Rights

There is no consensus about the extent and prioritization of rights and liberties sufficient to compel political secularism to converge on a single model of state-religion relations.[42] Civil atheology will not lead towards a convergence either, but it does take rights and liberties just as seriously. That devotion to those political ideals opens up the opportunity for civil theology to argue for theism. Civil theology denies that the true grounds for ideals of justice and rights are entirely secular, such as sensible self-interest,

compassionate sentiment, or pure rationality. Because Civil atheology is not premised on any theory about the justification for such political ideals, it cannot controvert civil theology on that point, and it has no basis for rejecting the alternative view, proposed by civil theology, that political ideals are ultimately grounded on normative ethical grounds. Again, just because certain modes of modern liberalism avoid appeals to ethics or any normative grounds to erect basic rights, Civil atheology cannot march in step. For the sake of argument, then, it may be admitted that the concept of human rights presumes the possibility of a universal ethics. Civil theology claims that the development of universal ethics depended on theistic religion, and continues to rely on theism. Civil atheology can observe historical relationships between the spread of universal ethics and a few large religions, but it denies that the validity to universal ethics or human rights rests on an adherence to theism.

Although human rights are not yet as universally recognized as could be hoped, most societies presently acknowledge some rights without labeling them in the same way. Civil societies regard degradations to health, life, safety, liberty, and property as so serious that their civil authorities take preventative measures, provide security, and punish offenders. Complete agreement about all proposed human rights, like an agreement about essential civil rights, is a separate matter. Across the planet, universal protection of human rights and guaranteed civil rights is a difficult problem, not an accomplishment. Civil atheology does not require a presumption that any universalization of human rights or civil rights is practically achievable or even theoretically demonstrable. A consensus among most peoples about rights and justice, however minimal, is sufficiently neutral ground for raising criticisms against religious convictions about god responsible for degradations or violations. Civil atheology should not endorse ethnocentrism, the principle that the world's peoples should not be expected to agree about social norms, which renders each society's norms unchallengeable. Instead of ethnocentric isolation (with its attendant risk of dehumanizing others), inter-cultural agreement about human dignity and respect should be acknowledged and prioritized.[43] Questioning the origins and basis for universal ethics, and hence the grounds for political ideals, is the next issue between civil theology and Civil atheology.

A few religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Confucianism, transcended the cultural bounds of the regions from which they arose. Their diminished expectations of cultural conformity permitted the emergence of generic moral respect—eligibility for coverage by moral norms—for any person, since anyone could be an actual or potential member of the religious community. That generic moral respect in turn provided the basis for the promotion of two universal ethical principles which required both (1) every person is due equal moral respect and treatment, and (2) all peoples should prioritize a duty to follow (1). A "universal ethics" for the expanding ethical community would therefore be any ethics

which simultaneously prioritizes the supreme duty to treat all others morally *and* prioritizes the expectation that all people shall follow that duty. A cultural or ideological ethics, by contrast, only prioritizes among members of a group the duty to treat all others morally, but does not seriously expect that others outside that moral community should do likewise.

There could be an indefinite number of universal ethics, because a universal ethics can consist of any set of specific moral norms, so long as it requires that all people should be treated morally and all people should dutifully treat each other morally. Taking universal ethics seriously does not imply a search for any exhaustive, unique, or unchanging morality. Universal ethics is quite consistent with moral pluralism and moral progress. However, an appreciation for universal ethics can encourage the further idea that a single comprehensive morality should prevail over all humanity. The idea of a comprehensive universal ethics is neither religious nor secular; both secular and religious worldviews may incorporate it without incurring any debt to the other worldview. However, grounding a universal ethics upon a supremely divine ruler is a combination that typically generates an "absolute ethics": a rigid set of moral principles setting all peoples' supreme duties for all time.

The transition towards an absolute ethics within certain religions was not accomplished in the same manner everywhere. Common features include requirements that every believer faithfully commit to a universal ethics, dutifully promote that universal ethics to nonbelievers, and expect converts to willingly commit to that universal ethics. As religions, they all still require religious commitment to ethical principles rather than straightforward ethical fidelity without any religious preconditions. A person trying to be ethical all on their own without the aid of the religious community or the sacred divine seems improbable and impious to religion. Still, the more theology encouraged universal moral respect and dutiful ethical conduct for its own sake, in order to surmount prejudice and reasonably appeal to all, the more theology liberated morality from tradition and authority. Over the past thousand years, theological religions such as Buddhism and Christianity, and to a lesser extent, Hinduism, Islam, and Confucianism, harbored thinkers who suspected that ethics was becoming not just the core driving force, but almost the entire doctrinal function, to the whole religion.[44]

With thoughtful ethics on the ascendant in several of the world's major religions, questioning got underway about what to do with miraculous, mythical, and supernatural features. If universal ethics emerged and matured within theological religions, would religions eventually be trimmed down to faith-based systems of ethics? For liberal theology, that simplification could ensure religion's relevance in a secularizing world. For philosophy, the universality of ethics for humanity could be secured by eliminating a parochial and judgmental deity. For atheology, the way that more secular society's *ethos* and moral rules perpetuate some norms from a religious heritage only means

that religion is secularizing, not that secular people should return to refill the churches and temples. The argument that a society should remain Christian (or Hindu, etc.) because that society's moral sense was shaped by a religion is fallacious, since the diminishment of religious aspects to an *ethos* can, and historically has, allowed societies to improve and strengthen that *ethos*. The most secular countries have the lowest levels of homicide, violence, civil unrest, child mortality, and other social pathologies, and those countries have some the highest degrees of stable government, democratic freedom, women's rights, life expectancy, and education. The sternest obstacles to the effective advancement of social equality, civil rights, and human rights has been theism and theology far more than atheism or secularization.[45]

Conservative religious thinkers still worry that a religiously ethical society could lose its secure grip on ethics if scripture and dogmatic theology were sidelined. A compressed master argument for conservative religion defends the conclusion that an ethical society must stay rigidly theistic, or else risk becoming immorally secular.

1. A society must maintain a universal ethics.
2. Historically, universal ethics is essentially linked with theological religion.
3. Philosophically, universal ethics could not be justified without theological arguments.
4. Culturally, universal ethics is maintained only by sustaining the same religious culture.
5. Politically, universal ethics is enforced only by religious institutions or religion-backed institutions.
6. Universal ethics is best maintained only by historical, philosophical, cultural, and political means.
7. Rising irreligion and secularity in a society will erode its maintenance of a universal ethics.

Therefore, a society should promote theological religion and prevent rising secularity.

Civil atheology shows how this argument fails to adequately support its conclusion. Premise 3 has been rendered dubious by much of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethical theory. Premise 4 is not credible by looking at highly secular societies today. Furthermore, premises 2 and 5 are factually false. The countries most devoted to justice and human rights, having enshrined them in their democratic constitutions, are among the least religious countries in the world today, with very few exceptions.[46]

Why must a historical link between two social institutions such as religion and government be presumed to endure forever? Nowhere else do we expect that general rule of "once linked, forever linked" to be true. For

example, the Anglo-American tradition of equal citizenship under one rule of law traces back to the Roman Empire, which for several centuries relied on autocratic Caesars to enforce that law—so America should revive the practice of worshiping autocrats as demi-gods? Evidently the idea of the rule of law is only contingently related to the form of supreme authority, and this idea was later separated away from Roman traditions and re-founded during the Enlightenment without a supreme lawgiver, human or divine. Secular political philosophy and legal theory, explaining how to justify constitutional governments without religion's involvement, shows why premise 3 does not have to be accepted. Furthermore, the theological arguments trying to make morality essentially dependent on god or faith, and the arguments trying to evade atheological accusations that religiosity cannot be so ethical, are all failures. There is no necessary connection between religion and universal ethics, and no mandatory relationship between religious institutions and enforcing universal ethics.

Theology does not need a history lesson. It can appreciate how the long course of cultural change in a civilization can disconnect what was formerly linked. Civil theology can argue that the approval of universal ethics among increasingly secular societies is just a contingent and fragile correlation, because firm bonds can weaken. That correlation between ethics and secularity may last for centuries, since respect for a universal ethics would not promptly vanish just because a culture's religiosity weakens, yet that lasting respect is shown towards a universal ethics indebted to religion, not to secularity. The view that secularism's fondness for human rights cannot hide how religion-free liberalism has borrowed what it could not engender and cannot nurture is a claim often heard from political theology. Civil atheology replies that there is little reason to think that representative and right-based democracy, despite its fragilities, would fade just because fewer and fewer citizens worshipped a theistic creator. Societies by definition contain the resources and institutions to perpetuate morality, ethical principles, social justice, and basic rights for generation after generation. Social institutions such as families, neighborhoods, schools, local governments, national governments, and so forth, have their own socializing forces quite apart from churches. Cultural inertia is powerful precisely because a society's members tend to sustain social structures and political ideals when they work well. Republics can collapse, and democracies have mutated into fascisms. Still, over the past two thousand years, religions complied with authoritarians more often than they sided with populaces, so no reliable link between religion and rights is in evidence. In sum, premises 4 and 5 are highly questionable.

With most of its premises left in doubt, this argument for theological religion cannot succeed. The promulgation of a theological religion upholding a deity is not required for society's adherence to its universal ethics, and the political ideals grounded in that ethics.

Equal Rights and Secular Government

A declaration of independence for human rights can express gratitude for the religious aspects of its heritage, while predicting that a separation of religion and rights will only enlarge rights for humanity. The world should no longer regard religious rights as the final word in human rights, even if the search for a nonreligious universal ethics suitable for reinforcing human rights is a continuing project.[47] That project's openness and incompleteness is the opportunity for civil theology to argue that only theism can ensure the realization of human rights. Two primary arguments from civil theology require Civil atheology's attention. First, if human rights cannot depend on anything supernatural, then they must be so-called 'natural' rights, but the naturality of inherently human rights calls for a theistic explanation. Second, a secular government enacting and defending human rights must apply ethical standards to prioritize them, but secularism knows no supreme ethical standards without guidance from theism.

Proposals from civil theology that "natural rights" are better explained by theism suffers from several problems. These natural rights are not built into the world by a creator, because Rationalist atheology rules out the reasonableness of design arguments. Even if a deity did craft nature's physical laws or humanity's bodily structure, Moral atheology warns that not even theology can non-fallaciously derive norms from facts. Suggesting that every person intuitively knows one's rights thanks to a divine installation or inspiration of innate ideas is refuted by Rationalist atheology's critique of revelation. Counting on miraculous interventions prodding people to acknowledge human rights is refuted by Scientific atheology. No room is left for godly involvement with natural rights. Natural rights for humans can only proceed from what it naturally means to live as humans and how we pursue productive and worthy lives. That earthly scenario is where nonreligious accounts of human rights would begin, and the need for a theological account must end.

Godless governments upholding godless rights was never going to be a simple matter, despite optimistic visions from some secularists. A secular government at minimum is a government neither controlled by religion, nor one that controls religion. In principle, any regulation regarding religiosity should only aim at effectuating either the first or the second aspect of mutual non-control. In practice, religious people complain that regulations insulating the government from religious entanglement, or refusing to bestow legal privileges to religious practices or institutions, amount to unfair discrimination against their religion. State neutrality never feels neutral to people who cannot get what they think they deserve, especially if they reject the political basis to secular government and prefer established religion or theocracy. Even in principle, however, the ideal of secular government does not automatically yield answers about which rights are fundamental human

rights, and which ranked prioritization of human rights should be applied to resolve inevitable dilemmas.

Further complicating matters, the historical course of liberalism in Europe formulated competing types of secular government: (1) secular government founded on human rights approved by a universal ethics, so that ethics can advise the selection and prioritization of human rights, or (2) secular government oriented to human rights approved by pragmatic interests, so that no universal ethics (religious or secular) has an advisory role. An illustration of the first type is President Abraham Lincoln's appeal to the Declaration of Independence to justify ending slavery, as for example in his Gettysburg Address (1863): "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." An illustration of the second type is Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.'s decision affirming the constitutionality of forced sterilization upon citizens: "We have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives. . . . It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind." Both statesmen were opposed by contrary views. Representative George H. Pendleton of Ohio was an implacable obstacle to the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery. The only dissent from Holmes's decision was raised by Justice Pierce Butler.[48] For the record, Lincoln and Pendelton were Protestants, Holmes was an agnostic, and Butler was a Catholic. No denomination or philosophy ever had a monopoly on righteousness. Religious voices could be heard on both sides of every American political struggle over rights since the Boston Tea Party.

Civil theology cannot claim that every struggle for human rights witnessed religion's full devotion to the progressive side, but it could claim that governments banishing universal ethics from political consideration would not be reliable guarantors of crucial human rights. Secular government guided by universal ethics is one political theory; mere secular politics unguided by ethics is a quite different political theory. On the theological presumption that theistic religion supplies an abiding universal ethics, at least in essentials, the unsuitability of secular politics implies the suitability of theistic secular government. Paradoxical in name, but providential in character, this alternative to utilitarian politics has been depicted as the forced choice by civil theology.

Secular politics was the target of Richard John Neuhaus's scorn. His Catholic objections in *The Naked Public Square* (1984) rest on his judgment that any secular state, because it won't rely on religious ethics, is left without any ethics at all. Neuhaus argues that politics often comes down to conflicts over values, but secular politics involves no supreme values to

affirm what is ethical, so secular governing is left with mere calculations about minimizing offense to citizens' individual rights.

> Without a transcendent or religious point of reference, conflicts of values cannot be resolved; there can only be procedures for their temporary accommodation. Conflicts over values are viewed not as conflicts between contending truths but as conflicts between contending interests. If one person believes that incest is wrong and should be outlawed while another person believes incest is essential for sexual liberation, the question in a thoroughly secularized society is how these conflicting "interests" might be accommodated. Since the person who practices incest can do so without denying the rights of the person who abhors incest, the accommodation will inevitably be skewed in favor of incest.[49]

For the sake of argument Neuhaus could admit that decent people, religious and nonreligious, easily judge that incest is morally impermissible because it is horribly harmful to the child. What about the corresponding political judgment that incest is therefore a terrible violation of that child's rights? Neuhaus mistakenly thinks that citizens using secular governing are prevented from transferring a moral judgment over to a political judgment. He then condemns any secular society bereft of theism's wisdom: "In a thoroughly secular society notions of what is morally excellent or morally base are not publicly admissible."[50]

Is Neuhaus's theistic morality so acceptable by contrast? He expresses his relief that America is not so secular that morality guides legislation more than science, yet his chosen case of good morality ridicules psychiatrists saying that homosexuality is not a mental illness.[51] According to his position, America remains an ethical society so long as conservative religious prejudice against homosexuality, and the religious liberty of theists to oppress people based on sexual preference, continues to enjoy enough political power to override scientific knowledge, virtuous compassion, and civil rights.

The lesson from Civil atheology is that the false dichotomies undergirding theistic politics can be rejected. Secular government can be guided by constitutional rights grounded in human rights. Human rights can be grounded in an understanding of the human condition, the sincerity of human empathy, and the wisdom of political experience. Universal ethics is not the exclusive possession of theistic religions. The political expansion of rights does not mean that social interests have descended into immorality. Getting past false dichotomies allows one to observe real civic progress unimpeded by religious conservativism. For example, the extension of equal rights to neglected groups actually shows how social consciences have ascended towards ethicality. Theistic ethics can either participate in that social progress, or be condemned to history's unholy confederacy of despotism, monarchy, aristocracy, and theocracy. Visionary theists on the right side of history can

take exactly as much credit as they deserve, as individual citizens contributing their voices to participatory democracy. No contribution from a god is needed to explain that worldly enterprise.

In conclusion, aligning the principles of good government with religious morality is never as justified as theism wants to think. Civil atheology concludes that wise societies will not permit religious ethics or civil religion to serve as the highest court judging who among us shall receive equal rights or social justice.[52] There is no god needed for fostering proper citizenship or good government.

Notes

1 Recent works relevant for Civil atheology include Kurtz, *In Defense of Secular Humanism* (1983); Cliteur, *The Secular Outlook: In Defense of Moral and Political Secularism* (2010); Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular: A Call to Arms for Religious Freedom* (2012); Blackford, *Freedom of Religion and the Secular State* (2012); and Leiter, *Why Tolerate Religion?* (2013).

2 A variety of perspectives on religion and violence are offered by this sampling: de Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives From Kant to Derrida* (2002); Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (2003); Avalos, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (2005); Teehan, *In the Name of God: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Ethics and Violence* (2010); Lewis, *Violence and New Religious Movements* (2011); Murphy, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* (2011); Juergensmeyer et al., ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (2013); and Kaplan, *Radical Religion and Violence* (2015). Monotheism has been accused of fostering violence-prone cultures; see discussions by Stark, *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism* (2001); Chilton, *Abraham's Curse: The Roots of Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (2008); Sloterdijk, *God's Zeal: The Battle of the Three Monotheisms* (2009); Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (2010); and Fine, *Political Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: From Holy War to Modern Terror* (2015). A representative work faulting modernism and secularism rather than religion is Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (2009). Fiala connects atheism, humanistic pacifism, and anarchism in *Against Religion, Wars, and States: The Case for Enlightenment Atheism, Just War Pacifism, and Liberal-Democratic Anarchism* (2013). Crediting religion with all the morality in the world and faulting worldly temptations for all the evils is Ward's thesis in *Is Religion Dangerous?* (2006).

3 Illustrations can guide the reader into these issues. The grand narrative that Christianity birthed rights and democracy is expounded by Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (2014). On the Roman Catholic Church's suspicions towards democracy, consult Perreau-Saussine, *Catholicism and Democracy: An Essay in the History of Political Thought* (2012). A Protestant analysis of modern liberalism is offered by Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (1999). A Christian justification for America's compromise between church and state is provided by Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology* (2012).

4 Turner, "Religion: Illusions and Liberation" (1991).

5 Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1996), chap. 2, p. 19.

6 See Martinich, *Hobbes* (2013), chap. 6.

7 Rousseau, *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Two "Discourses" and the "Social Contract"* (2012), p. 270.
8 Cohen, "Religion vs Non-establishment: Reflections on 21st-century Political Theology, Part 1" (2013).
9 Story, *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* (1833), vol. 3, pp. 722–723, 727.
10 Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (2011), p. 310. For global perspectives on the application of Taylor's theses about secularism, see Bilgrami, *Beyond the Secular West* (2016).
11 Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (1997).
12 See for example Judge, "The Religion of the Secularists" (2014).
13 See McPherran, "The Gods and Piety of Plato's Republic" (2008).
14 Aristotle, *The Politics, and the Constitution of Athens* (2005). See Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* (2002).
15 Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws* (1999), p. 18.
16 Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws* (1999), pp. 22–23.
17 See Atkins, *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason: The Republic and Laws* (2013).
18 Marsilius of Padua, *The Defendor of the Peace* (2005), p. 28.
19 Marsilius of Padua, *The Defendor of the Peace* (2005), p. 35.
20 Marsilius of Padua, *The Defendor of the Peace* (2005), p. 140.
21 See Nederman, *Community and Consent: The Secular Political Theory of Marsiglio of Padua's Defensor Pacis* (1994); Koch, "Marsilius of Padua on Church and State" (2011); and Berlinerblau, "Political Secularism" (2017).
22 Ockham, *A Short Discourse on Tyrannical Government* (1992). See McGrade, *The Political Thought of William of Ockham* (1974), and Shogimen, *Ockham and Political Discourse in the Late Middle Ages* (2007).
23 Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (1996), pp. 131–132.
24 Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (1996), p. 34–35.
25 Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (1996), p. 35.
26 See Vivanti, *Niccolo Machiavelli: An Intellectual Biography* (2011); Viroli, *Machiavelli's God* (2012); Roecklein, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism: An Investigation Into the Origins of Early Modern Political Thought* (2012). See also Osler, ed., *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought* (1991).
27 Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (2002).
28 Hobbes, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (2008). Consult Lessay, "Hobbes and Sacred History" (2000).
29 Pufendorf, *The Political Writings of Samuel Pufendorf* (1994), p. 74–75.
30 Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace* (2012); Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law* (1991); Thomasius, *Essays on Church, State, and Politics* (2007); Consult Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Europe* (2006).
31 Diderot, *Political Writings* (1992), pp. 6–7. On the role of skepticism in the early modern political theory, see Laursen and Paganini, ed., *Skepticism and Political Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (2015).
32 See Hobson, "Diderot's Earlier Philosophical Writings" (2011).
33 Paine, *Political Writings* (2000). See Lamb, *Thomas Paine and the Idea of Human Rights* (2015).
34 Madison, *Selected Writings of James Madison* (2006), p. 22.
35 The letter to the Danbury Baptists is reprinted in Jefferson, *Political Writings* (1999), pp. 396–397. See Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (2002), and Gunn and Witte Jr., ed., *No Establishment of Religion: America's Original*

Contribution to Religious Liberty (2012). Israel explores European experiments in democracy in *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (2009). Audi's *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (2000) is both philosophically rigorous and admirably readable. Contested views over the centrality of religious liberty are represented by Trigg, *Equality, Freedom, and Religion* (2012), and Leiter, *Why Tolerate Religion?* (2013).

36 Quoted in Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (2002), p. 116. See Klinghard and Gish, *Thomas Jefferson and the Science of Republican Government: A Political Biography of Notes on the State of Virginia* (2017).

37 Quoted in Waldman, *Founding Faith: How Our Founding Fathers Forged a Radical New Approach to Religious Liberty* (2008), pp. 167–168. On early America, see Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (2003), and Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (2006). On France, see Lalouette, *La séparation des églises et de l'état (1789–1905)* (2005); Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (2009); and Berenson et al., ed., *The French Republic: History, Values, Debates* (2011). See also Hargreaves et al., ed., *Politics and Religion in France and the United States* (2007).

38 Thomas Jefferson to Roger C. Weightman (June 24, 1826). Jefferson also wrote to John Adams, "To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise: but I believe I am supported in my creed of materialism . . ." (August 15, 1820). Additional avowals of his Epicureanism are in letters to John Adams (June 27, 1813) and William Short (October 31, 1819). These letters are published in Jefferson, *Political Writings* (1999). See also Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible* (2012), and Samuelson, "Jefferson and Religion: Private Belief, Public Policy" (2009).

39 Wright, *Course of Popular Lectures* (1829). Beecher's lectures were first published in *Lectures on Scepticism* (1835) and reprinted in *Lectures on Political Atheism and Kindred Subjects* (1852). On Wright and Rose, see Kolmerten, *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose* (1999). See also Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (1895–98). On Du Bois, see Kahn, *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois* (2011).

40 Botting, *Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Women's Human Rights* (2016) and Clark, *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin* (1977).

41 On Horkheimer, see Kohlenbach and Geuss, ed., *The Early Frankfurt School and Religion* (2005), and Mendieta, ed., *The Frankfurt School on Religion* (2005). On Foucault, see Carrette, *Foucault and Religion* (2013).

42 On comparative secularism, consult Levey and Modood, ed., *Secularism, Religion, and Multicultural Citizenship* (2009); Calhoun et al., ed., *Rethinking Secularism* (2011); Dressler and Mandair, ed., *Secularism and Religion-Making* (2011); and Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State* (2015).

43 The reader may enter into this topic with Kateb, *Human Dignity* (2011), and Smith, *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others* (2011).

44 Only selected works on religions and ethics can be mentioned here. On Hinduism, see Bilimoria et al., ed., *Indian Ethics: Classical Traditions and Contemporary Challenges* (2007). On Buddhism, see Hershock, *Chan Buddhism* (2005), and Heirman and Bumbacher, ed., *The Spread of Buddhism* (2007). On Judaism, Rome, and Christianity, see Witte and Alexander, ed., *Christianity and Law* (2008), and Willem van Henten and Verheyden, ed., *Early Christian Ethics in Interaction With Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts* (2012). On Islam, see

Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (2007). On the rise of liberal Christianity and ethics, see Gardner, *Justice and Christian Ethics* (1995); Byrne, *The Moral Interpretation of Religion* (1998), and Zimmermann, *Humanism and Religion: A Call for the Renewal of Western Culture* (2012). On religious ethics in world history, see Gupta and Banerji, ed., *Humanisation of the World Religions* (2001), and Wright, *The Evolution of God* (2009). Detecting an endorsement of universal human rights in sacred scriptures or religious traditions must be tempered with careful exegesis and historical research; see for example De Bary and Tu, ed., *Confucianism and Human Rights* (1998); Martin et al., ed., *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions* (2003); Ishay, *The History of Human Rights* (2004); Witte and Green, ed., *Religion and Human Rights* (2011); Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (2012); and Stamos, *The Myth of Universal Human Rights* (2015).

45 The reader may consult typical pro-religion positions taken by Mitchell, *Religious and Secular: The Dilemma of the Traditional Conscience* (1980); Lewy, *Why America Needs Religion: Secular Modernity and Its Discontents* (1996); and Mohler Jr., *Culture Shift: The Battle for the Moral Heart of America* (2008). On secular demographics and social statistics see Zuckerman et al, *The Nonreligious: Understanding Secular People and Societies* (2016).

46 WIN-Gallup International's "Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism" (2012), reported that among the top twenty countries with the highest percentage of atheists, seventeen are constitutional democracies with histories of respect for rights. The other three countries are China, Hong Kong, and Russia. The United States was not among those twenty countries, but it has a sizable percentage of atheists, ranking in the world's top twenty-five countries.

47 On the concept of global ethics, a diverse selection of works are suggestive: Kung, ed., *Yes to a Global Ethic* (1996); Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (2004); Kymlicka and Sullivan, ed., *The Globalization of Ethics: Religious and Secular Perspectives* (2007); Madsen and Strong, ed., *The Many and the One: Religious and Secular Perspectives on Ethical Pluralism in the Modern World* (2009); and the Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion* (2011).

48 Richards, *Who Freed the Slaves? The Fight Over the Thirteenth Amendment* (2015). Cohen, *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck* (2017).

49 Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (1986), p. 110.

50 Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (1986), p. 111.

51 Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (1986), p. 111. Psychiatry's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* had removed homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1974, not that Neuhaus cared. Also consult Cady and Fessenden, ed., *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference* (2013).

52 On civil religion, see Bellah's considered reflections in *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (1992). The concept of civil religion was, as Bellah himself realized, too vague for encapsulating the long and complex American experience of religion in politics. Consult analyses by Marty, *Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance* (1989); Cady, *Religion, Theology, and American Public Life* (1993); Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (2010); and Davis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Church and State in the United States* (2010). Seeking varieties of civil religion in cultures across history can be enlightening; see for example Weed and von Heyking, ed., *Civil Religion in Political Thought* (2010).

11 Complete Atheology

The four atheologies—rationalist, scientific, moral, and civic—have a philosophical heritage as old as, if not older than, the formation of theology. Typical writings of atheology fall into one or another these four methods. Quite rare are thinkers who comprehensively advance all four atheologies during their careers. Rarer still are thinkers who coherently unite all four atheologies to work cooperatively together as a complete atheology.

Comprehensive atheologies are rare because thinkers have their own preferred methods for tackling philosophical and religious issues. A logical skeptic may not be eager to construct an ontological worldview, a scientific mind might lack the temperament of an ethical sage or social reformer, and a political theorist could lack the patience for metaphysical disputation. The higher standard above comprehensive atheology is its coherent unification on entirely rational-naturalistic-secular grounds without internal inconsistencies or lingering hints of reliance, positively or negatively, on religious ideas or sentiments. Forging that complete atheology is by no means a simple secular achievement, since the needed degree of coherence is not easily achieved. For example, skeptical reason may deny the scientific realism sufficient for naturalism; naturalism may deny the moral agency required for secular ethics; and political rights may require other foundations besides reason and nature. Falling short of comprehensiveness and coherence despite every assistance from philosophy can leave an atheology vulnerable due to incompleteness. Appeals to metaphysical necessities, cognitive necessities and a prioris, and fixed absolutes, whether in the guise of reason, science, or ethics, have also remained a powerful secular temptation. If the last temptations can all be resisted, then a comprehensively coherent atheology can become a complete atheology.

Complete atheology was beyond the grasp of Western atheism for a long time, after the materialism of Epicurus. Thomas Hobbes achieved a complete atheology before science's maturation. Within a brief period of less than two centuries, the foundations of the physical and life sciences offered the opportunity to reinvigorate complete atheology. Isaac Newton's theories of motion and gravity in *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687) and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in *On the Origin of Species*

(1859) eliminated divine responsibility for guiding the heavenly bodies and creating the species of life. With scientific knowledge on the ascendant and natural explanations for our intellectual capacities in development, skepticism began to ally with naturalism by the end of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century also witnessed dramatic alliances between naturalism and ethics, exemplified in the complete atheologies of Karl Marx and Ludwig Büchner. Friedrich Nietzsche announced that god had died at the hands of humanity, yet he perceived how atheism can stay transfixed in god's lingering "shadow" by seeking necessities, absolutes, and finalities. The four volumes of his middle period yield his complete atheology: *The Gay Science* (1882), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887).

At the start of the twentieth century, there appeared three philosophical systems which satisfy high atheological standards. Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce published his *Filosofia come scienza dello spirit* (Philosophy of the Spirit) in four volumes from 1902 to 1917, with *Philosophy of the Practical: Economic and Ethic* (1913) as its centerpiece. Spanish-born American philosopher George Santayana published his five-volume *The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress* (1905–06). Importantly, Santayana's philosophy assigns a role for metaphysical thinking and religious experience, ensuring that secular philosophy can explain religiosity. That agenda was shared by American philosopher John Dewey's *Experience and Nature* (1925), *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), and *A Common Faith* (1934), which together yield a complete atheology.

Few examples of even a comprehensive atheology are available after Dewey. A partial list provides some illustrations. One was assembled by American philosopher Corliss Lamont in *Humanism as a Philosophy*, later retitled *The Philosophy of Humanism* (1993). Indian socialist and freethinker M.N. Roy composed a set of tracts during the 1940s and early 1950s presenting a broad philosophical and scientific humanism, including *Science and Philosophy* (1947) and *Radical Humanism* (1952). British philosopher Antony Flew's books *The Presumption of Atheism* (1976) and *Atheistic Humanism* (1993) together offer a comprehensive atheology. German philosopher Jürgen Habermas developed an entirely secular worldview in major works including *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Theory of Communicative Action, 1981) and *Faktizität und Geltung* (Between Facts and Norms, 1992), and specifically in *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion* (Between Naturalism and Religion, 2005). Canadian philosopher Kai Nielsen's two works, *God and the Grounding of Morality* (1991) and *Naturalism and Religion* (2001), together provide a comprehensive atheological philosophy.

Complete atheology attains an even higher standard. Too many atheologians prove unable to adequately ground their own positions, or they leave key tenets at odds with each other, or they may base their views on foundations more favorable to religiosity than secularity. Primary examples include

these deficiencies: pursuing their humanism spiritually (yearning for transcendence); resigning themselves to naturalism nihilistically (leaving only subjectivism); bracing knowledge with a priori necessities (leading to platonism); abandoning objective truth methodologically (embracing just relativism); discerning values and ideals existentially (while demoting science); endorsing moral rules traditionally (relying on religion); or grounding their political systems rationalistically or idealistically (ignoring human nature).

Complete atheologies since Nietzsche and Croce are rare. It can be argued that Habermas is one example in the German language. In the English language, after Santayana and Dewey, another came from philosopher Paul Kurtz, who was educated at Columbia University in the Deweyan tradition of pragmatic naturalism. In a trilogy of works—*In Defense of Secular Humanism* (1983), *The Transcendental Temptation: A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal* (1986), and *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism* (1987)—he offered a complete atheology in exclusively secular terms without appeals to transcendence, existentialism, subjectivism, nihilism, moral absolutes, a priori principles, or a "God's eye" view of the world.

To summarize, atheology explores what atheists think, why they are not religious, and how disbelief in gods can be reasonably defended. Atheology's defenses of atheism are more sophisticated than the wider genre of religious criticism, which secular people also undertake. Religious criticism provides practical ways to point out how religion is deleterious to individual people and entire societies. Because religious criticism appeals to what is already locally taken to be common knowledge and good sense, it cannot offer justifications why no one anywhere should be religious. Atheology encompasses the intellectual efforts to explain why it is reasonable for anyone to lack religious convictions and think that no gods are real.

Four primary methods of atheology have been pursued across the long history of philosophy: the rationalist, scientific, moral, and civil atheologies. The task of clearly explaining atheism is undertaken by three modes of atheology designed for separate educational levels. Pedagogical atheology is instruction guiding children and young adults away from religiosity and towards secular and scientific worldviews. Practical atheology is designed for adult audiences who want to understand their secularity, find nonreligious answers to life's big questions, and defend their chosen secular lifestance against religions. Philosophical atheology assembles sophisticated intellectual justifications for disbelief in the godly beings proclaimed by religions and defended by theologies. If that collection of justifications is comprehensive, and effectively organized and matched against the major strategies of theology, then philosophical atheology can become systematic. The highest achievement for systematic atheology is complete atheology: a fully secular system of all four atheological methods working in coherent harmony.

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